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PITILESS YOUTH

By

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To

'ZULU'

MAJOR G. L. LLOYD, M.C., A.F.C.

PROLOGUE

CHRISTOPHER MARLING, driving to Covent Garden on the evening of the twelfth of May, nineteen hundred and nineteen, found life good.

For over thirty years he had practised as a solicitor in King Street, St. James's. His life had belonged utterly to the days when men had led untroubled lives, and had treated Ascot, Wimbledon, the Horse Show, Henley and Goodwood as matters of routine in their yearly round. And, in common with many of his kind, Marling had wondered frequently during the dark days of the war as to the outcome of this world upheaval. Whilst he had hidden those fleeting fears behind a brave smile, there had been moments, nevertheless, when he had found his courage to be waning. It had been so long—so drawn-out, this struggle. He had found the continual strain telling upon his sixty-five years. And for relaxation during those days, when not sitting on Committees or meeting the stragglers and un-met at Victoria Station—whence he had driven them to their destinations—he had walked the streets of his beloved London. Would it return again, he wondered? Would the sombreness of its buildings be removed—the sombreness of its people? Would men laugh again as once they had laughed—laughter that rang so true? Would those ugly huts that were then built on empty sites be ever demolished? Or the buildings that remained skeletons, because work had been stopped so suddenly upon them, be completed? It had been strange, the London of that time. A spirit of unrest had descended upon it. There were strange faces in the streets—strange uniforms, too. The sad faces of the womenfolk; the limping men on crutches, who passed him by. London at that time had

been usurped by a new people, and its old life had seemed cloaked by a darkened pall.

It was for this reason that Christopher Marling found especial comfort in driving to Covent Garden on that pleasant evening in the May of that year, to attend the first night of Grand Opera. For was not the opening of the London Season heralded by the opening of Grand Opera? And did not the return of the London Season mark, inevitably, London's return to normal?

Marling was driving first to his club. As a man who had taken care of his constitution, he ate frugally. When time permitted, he dined in leisurely fashion, selecting always the choicest of wines—of which he was a connoisseur—and displaying an unusual knowledge in the ordering of a dinner. He was no epicure, yet his knowledge—like his knowledge of art—was something that had been carefully studied. But the Barlows gave endless and extremely rich dinners, and he was in no mood for those things to-night. So with a "Most awfully kind of you, Henry. It will be rather a rush. Better meet you there," he was to join them at Covent Garden. Meantime—a glass of sherry. A sandwich, perhaps. He was excited; unusually excited.

The taxi turned into St. James's Street and drew up on the left-hand side. Marling paid the man three shillings and went inside. Nodding to Stevens, the Hall Porter, he walked to the cloak-room and deposited his coat and top-hat. Then, after standing before the mirror for a moment brushing a few straying hairs into place, he turned and walked upstairs to the dining-room. Greville was sitting at his usual table in the corner, unchanged and untidy.

"'Evening, Marling. Earlier to-night?"

"Just off to the opera, Greville. Dropped in for a sandwich. Mind if I sit here?"

"Do. What's on?"

"Bohème. Melba's singing." Marling sat down and picked up the menu. "Told it's going to be good." Then, looking up: "Things flourishing in the city?"

"Booming! Everything is."

Greville had an unfortunate habit of eating noisily. It came about through bad adenoids; he could never breathe through his nose and consequently he was forced to eat with his mouth open. It was this that accounted for his dining alone so frequently at the corner table. It gave also a curious intonation to his voice, and he spoke exceedingly quickly, which made him difficult to understand. People found him dull, too, for he retired every evening to the billiard room and played 'Snooker' until it was time to go home. And all the while he played he talked of nothing save his business, and his business was stockbroking. And stockbrokers, except for their stories, which Greville never told, can be exceedingly dull if they have no other conversation. But Greville and Marling were old friends. They conducted each other's business; Greville investing Marling's savings, and Marling guiding Greville in matters pertaining to law. Frequently new wills were drawn up under Marling's direction, for Greville, like all men who make money with the rise and fall of industrial markets, must thereby increase or decrease the value of their legacies as occasion demands.

The club waiter stood patiently by.

"A sandwich, Thompson. Caviare, please. And a glass of brown sherry."

"Seen the papers to-night, Marling? 'Combines' touched four and a half. You'll have to come in, my boy. A fortune to be made. Nothing to stop 'em. They'll touch ten before the year's out. Mark my words! I'm in myself—up to my eyes."

"Dangerous, Greville," Marling mused.

"I'd put my shirt on, I tell you. I told you about 'em at two. They'll open at four and threequarters to-morrow. Mosenthal's buying heavily. There's absolutely nothing to stop 'em."

"Thank you, Thompson." Marling regarded his sandwich solemnly. "What does it mean, anyway?" he asked, looking up again. "You told me not many years ago that after nearly twenty-five years as a stockbroker, you were—apart from your business—almost where you were. What's the good of it? Anxiety—affluence. Anxiety, and it's gone!"

"But these are exceptional times, Marling. We've won the war, and by Gad, we're going to have the fruits now! What did the Prime Minister say? A land fit for heroes! Do you think he'll let the foreigner in again? No, I tell you! We're in for a time of unrivalled prosperity. The war's taught us many things. It's put us on our feet. It's put us years ahead of our time. We've *developed*! Look at aviation! Gad, five years ago it was hardly thought of!"

"True. But where has it taken us? It isn't commercial. Do you think that you and I will ever travel that way?"

Greville paused with his fork poised. "We'll see it, Marling. We'll see it," he said. "You and I don't realize how we've progressed. The war's taken us too fast. Aviation, tanks, wireless—it's all come too suddenly. Dammit, the blessed aeroplanes themselves are wirelessing to each other now! I'm told that if the war hadn't ended they'd have been flying to Berlin at night and getting there entirely by wireless! Think of that! Through all that noise, too! Look at dyes! Look how we've progressed there! It makes you think, Marling."

"It does." Marling munched his sandwich slowly. "And you are of the opinion," he asked, "that we are really in for a big trade revival?"

"Sure of it, Marling. Sure of it. We've developed our own industries in an amazing way. Foreign competition won't exist—like it used to. Everything's booming, too. People are buying almost blindly—and still they're right."

"And doesn't saturation point come in somewhere?"

"Oh, of course, there's bound to be a settling down. Things are a bit top-heavy at the moment, I'll agree. But it's the natural tendency. They'll be building everywhere soon, and that'll absorb thousands of men and many industries. Shipping will have to be put right—there's a big dearth of ships. Where can you look to-day without finding something that hasn't fallen into decay and won't need putting right? And is there a solution to any one of those problems that isn't years ahead of its time? No,

my boy, the war sharpened our wits. It made us find ways. And, by Gad, we found 'em!"

"It's good to hear you speak so enthusiastically, Greville. I only hope it's true," Marling said, sipping his sherry. "We lawyers regard things in rather a different light. . . ."

"Oh, you lawyers! You won't buy 'Combines' till you see it all on paper. Nothing's right till it's proved. Everything must be in black and white, sealed, signed and delivered! You miss your opportunities, my boy."

It was curious that Greville, although ten years younger, always addressed his friend as though their respective ages were reversed.

"I don't buy 'Combines,' Greville, because it isn't my business," Marling said. "My business is the law, and I make my money through it. And when I make money I put it into something safe and I leave it there and draw my dividends, knowing that they will never be passed. There's a great deal in knowing where you stand." With that he wiped his grey moustache with a table napkin and looked over at the clock.

"Must you be going?" Greville asked.

"Not for a moment. Another sandwich, Thompson. They're excellent. And another glass of sherry."

The club waiter bowed and retired.

"You see," Marling continued, "I'm comfortably off, I suppose. I live alone now, since my wife died. There's only the boy. . . ."

"Ah, Hugh! What about him?" Greville asked quickly.

Marling affected an indifference, which he always did when speaking of his son. He hated emotion of any kind; it was cheap; undignified. "He'll be back any day now," he answered.

"A great home-coming, eh?"

"Great? I don't know. His mother, you know. . . ."

"Of course."

Silence fell upon both men. Marling turned and looked out of the window. Below the traffic streamed up and down St. James's Street. It was not dark yet. Greville balanced his cheese knife on the index finger of his right

hand till it collapsed on to a plate, when he picked it up clumsily. Thompson arrived with the sherry and sandwich.

"Ah, thank you, Thompson."

Marling ate silently.

"And what will Hugh do?" Greville asked presently, having beaten a tattoo on the tablecloth with the fallen cheese knife.

"Do? The Bar, I hope. Depends, of course. He may want to do something else, Greville. After all, he's developed a bit. He may not want to get down to studies again. After all, these boys have earned the right of choosing their careers. I'd never stand in his way. But I'd like him to go to the Bar."

"You'd help him enormously there?"

"I can put work his way, of course. But it takes a long time, Greville. No money for years, you know. And youth wants everything at once. It can't wait—not like it used to."

"But money won't affect Hugh. You're in a position to give him all he needs."

"Ah, yes. I suppose so, Greville."

"He'll live with you. No expenses?"

"Maybe he'd rather live alone."

"But you've kept on Princes Gate?"

"Oh yes. Why not? Lived there for over thirty years. One gets attached to a place."

Marling turned again, munching slowly, and watched the traffic as it moved up and down St. James's Street; again Greville drummed a tattoo on the tablecloth with his cheese knife.

Presently:

"Well, if the boy doesn't want the Bar, send him to me. I can do with him."

Marling turned. Swallowing his second sherry, he put the glass down with an air of friendly finality, smiled charmingly and said: "That's nice of you, Greville. We'll see."

Again he wiped his silver-grey moustache with his table napkin, which this time he put back on to the table. Then he rose, pushed back his chair to the table and adjusted his tie.

"And if you're worrying about the boy being short of

money," Greville added slyly, "buy him a thousand or two 'Combines.' He'll make all he needs when he wants to sell them!"

"You're an incorrigible salesman, Greville, but I like you," Marling said. "I'll see you to-morrow, maybe?"

"Maybe. I'll be in about six."

With a nod Marling proceeded to the desk and paid his bill. As he was leaving, Greville called: "Enjoy the opera. It's double Dutch to me!"

Marling smiled again in the direction of the table in the corner and went out. As he did so, he saw Greville delve once more into the financial section of the *Evening Standard*, which had lain beside him on the table throughout their conversation.

Once outside, he searched for a taxi. It was one of the few occasions when Marling had had to rely upon taxis in the evening. But Walker, his chauffeur, was ill. It occurred to him then, that he should have hired a car. After all, this was an occasion—the first night of the opera, and he should have done justice to it. Instead, he walked up St. James's Street and into Piccadilly. There was still plenty of time. The evening was balmy; one of the loveliest of the Spring of that year. He enjoyed the walk. He enjoyed the people. He watched the cars passing him filled with others on their way to the play—or, maybe, to the opera, too. There was an infinite peace about this hectic London now; a grandeur to which he was strangely attached. It was said of Marling that, next to E. V. Lucas, he had the best knowledge of England's capital; not the text-book knowledge, but that of its hidden beauties—the beauties that men pass daily and never see until they are pointed out to them. Walking in London was to Marling a source of inspiration and pride. London had tradition. It *meant* something. Paris was beautiful enough; so were Vienna and Budapest—but they lacked stability. And stability was a necessary adjunct to Marling's make-up.

His hat was perched at an angle that might have been described as jaunty. He had put it on that way unconsciously; yet it was descriptive of his mood. He *felt* jaunty; his step was jaunty. He walked as a man might

who had been indoors for days and was out for the first time, breathing in the purest of sea air and being revived by it. Yet his step was measured; he never hurried unduly. His was an unruffled mind. He saw everything in its proper place, putting the correct value upon everything that happened, or was. When men at the club had become excited during the war, Marling had always been the last to speak and his words had given comfort. "Old Marling's so damned sound," they would say. "Wonderful old chap. Wonder he never went into the House. The sort of man they need there."

But politics had never interested Marling. Ambitions he had none, save the correct and efficient handling of his clients' affairs, which were of paramount importance to him. And for this reason his practice had grown to be one of the most successful in London. The affairs of many an historic family were entrusted to his care, and had been for many years. One trusted Marling instinctively. His appearance, some said, had been strongly in his favour, too—had helped towards his success. His tall, lean figure; his grey and luxuriant hair; his complexion, which had the glow of indoor health, as apart from the ruddier glow of those who live in the open air; the inevitable frock-coat and top-hat —all helped. He looked distinguished and his manners were old-world and courtly. He himself deplored deeply the falling off in manners which the war had brought about; he deplored, in the same way, the looseness that had crept into men's attire with their return to civilization. His friends wore Homburg hats in the Park on Sunday! Lounge suits, too! Indeed London had changed, he thought. Understandable, no doubt, with all this wholesale slaughtering, which would upset any nation fundamentally. But a great pity. He noted, too, that few of his fellow-lawyers had kept up their traditional clothing. Old Jenks, in the same building, had returned from the war in a bowler hat and short coat! But Marling had kept a tradition of longer standing, for his was a *frock*-coat. And his would always be such a coat. Marling was conservative to a degree.

He reached Piccadilly Circus. The paper boy on the

corner thrust an evening paper before him. He bought it, telling the boy to keep the fivepence change. Then he crossed over and walked along Coventry Street, with an eye on the flag of every taxi that passed, in case it should be vacant. But there was a dearth of taxis at that time, and one was still more or less at their mercy. Then near the old Elysée he found one that had just deposited two people there. It was an old and decrepit vehicle and he dirtied a white glove as he helped himself in. Confound the fellow! He studied his glove with a sense of annoyance. Here he was going to the Grand Opening—the rest had been but mere preliminaries—with a dirty glove! "Covent Garden," he snapped, "as quickly as you can!"

Yes, London was indeed returning to its original glory. And he, Marling would be there to witness it! It was no wonder, therefore, that driving through the back streets to Covent Garden on that pleasant evening of May the twelfth, 1919, he found such contentment in life.

The Barlows were relations. His wife's cousin had married Henry Barlow, the banker. Until his wife, Effie, developed consumption in 1917 and died within a few months, they had seen a great deal of one another. Each family had dined frequently with the other. But since Effie's death Marling had kept much to himself. He had the feeling always that people were sorry for him and were asking him to their houses to share his loneliness. Marling was touched, but he reacted slowly. It was noticeable that he never discussed his wife. Some thought him lacking in the usual feelings. But Marling had loved Effie with a love that was far beyond common description or discussion. He could not talk of her with other people; she had died. No one would understand the companionship she had given him. Nor could they understand the gap that she had left. To hear people offering their sympathy in the accepted manner, nauseated him. They didn't understand; they couldn't understand. So he had kept to himself as much as possible and had avoided those houses where he and Effie had visited so often together. Men were all right; that was why he went so often to his club. It was the

women who tried to be *kind* who exasperated Marling. And most women of his own generation he found exceedingly kind. Margaret Barlow was such a woman, but then she was a relation. She had known Christopher for over thirty years. She understood his reserve and his infinite pride. Barlow, on the other hand, did not. "Odd fellow, Christopher! Never mentioned Effie's name in my presence as far as I can remember. And I'm a kind of relation! Anyone would think that he didn't care."

But Margaret would answer: "That's because he *does*, Henry."

But Henry never quite understood. Yet he liked Christopher. He, in common with all men, respected him. Years ago they had hunted together regularly. They shot together still. They laughed and joked in their own way. Like Greville and Marling, they gave each other mutual advice. They met in the club frequently. But Christopher did not approve of Henry wholeheartedly. He found him changing as the years went by. He seemed endlessly caught up in the tide—the tide that rushes in and out with the changing moon.

Henry, too, was as ambitious as Christopher was not. Henry had made money—a great deal of money. He had given lavishly to Party Funds. He was seen here and there; he spoke frequently at big dinners. And as his importance grew, so did the size of his house, the number of his motors, and the number of his servants The thing that irritated Marling about him above all else was the sudden affixing of his crest to the doors of his growing fleet of motor-cars. That struck Marling as exceedingly bad taste. It was ostentatious—and Marling was never that. "Dammit, the fellow isn't in the peerage yet!" he had once remarked to Greville.

But withal, there was an affection between them, rugged and sincere. That Henry had taken one of the most expensive boxes at Covent Garden for the whole season only amused him, for Henry had no ear for music. In fact, he boasted that he could not even whistle in tune. That he had contributed, therefore, and had become a patron of the opera, did not cause him concern. Christopher under-

stood. It was part of Henry's game. That a cousin of his by marriage was striving for a peerage to go with the arms on his carriage doors did not unduly upset him either. Although Marling would perhaps deny it, it would not be repellent to him to have a peerage so close at hand. The pity of it was that so many had been *bought* during this appalling war period! It had lowered its prestige considerably. But Henry had done fine work during that time. Some said that if he hadn't taken a stand against certain members of the Cabinet at a time of crisis, that honour would have been his before.

The taxi had chugged its way into a long queue, which moved forward in intermittent steps of a few yards. It was still not quite dark; the moment in Spring between day and night which vanishes so quickly, leaving behind a crispness in the air which thrills and invigorates. Christopher regarded the dirty glove. "As bad as getting into a French train! Never found a clean handle there yet. Confound the fellow!" He looked at his watch and the length of the queue and decided to walk the remaining yards. It was his rule in life to be punctual and where women were present, it was a golden rule. He paid off the taxi with an instruction to 'keep his wretched handles clean,' and passed by the line of cars into the foyer.

A bewildering mass of humanity met his gaze. 'Bewildering' because the jewels themselves flashed in the lights from above and added to its brilliance. He moved slowly in, his eyes searching for the Barlows. The hubbub of the conversation was like the sudden escape of air from a tyre with a clean puncture. It was shrill and excited. It came suddenly and in direct contrast to the noises outside —the intermittent hooting of motor-horns by people far back in the queue who considered that the people in front were taking a longer time than was necessary in removing themselves from their respective limousines; or the policemen who handled the traffic; or the remarks of the sightseers who watched the procession keenly; and proudly, too, if they were able to pick out some celebrity and remark upon it to their neighbours—for Cockneys love the pageantry of life, due, maybe, to the fact that they see so

little of it. Christopher bowed here and there and took his stand at the bottom of the staircase. He felt unduly moved and wondered at himself.

There was the Spanish Ambassador! There Lord Spalding! The Duke of Morningham just coming in. How splendid he looked! Wonderful to think he'd led that expedition not a year ago. The papers were full of it. Didn't look a day over fifty. And his wife with him. "Hello, yes. How do you do?" Marling found himself adding to the hubbub of conversation as people passed. "Seems years since we met *here*. Eh, Marling?" "Rather! Where are you sitting? See you after the first act." There was Mosenthal. And there Pickering. "Hello, Marling, what news of the boy? Home soon? Splendid. Have to get together. Michael's home. Starting in the city next week." "*If it isn't Marling!* Here, Molly—Christopher Marling! You remember him? Hugh's father. Of course! Some years, what? Jove yes! Nice to see you."

It was grand, this. It was exciting. Here they were—all of them—back again. Khaki discarded! Odd to think that they'd been killing people only six months before. To look at them now made it seem an impossibility; just a dream; or a play, perhaps. Gentle creatures they looked, too, in their dignified tail-coats; clean, too, in their well-laundered linen; brown, too, against the whiteness of their shirt-fronts.

They were splendid people, these, Christopher thought—quite splendid.

Barlow appeared, apologetic: "Sorry, Christopher. Never saw such a queue. Been in it over twenty minutes."

With them were the Cunninghames and Zania Hardcastle. Christopher knew the first couple but not Zania, and the introduction effected, they proceeded in another queue up the stairs. The hubbub continued; one heard it below and all round. Their box was on the first tier, facing the stage. Christopher had gathered that it would be there; Henry's name was printed on a piece of white cardboard attached to the door. 'Mr. and Mrs. Henry Barlow,' it said. A little pretentious Marling thought, having this

box three nights a week when Henry couldn't even whistle in tune—and hated music, anyway. But he was grateful for being able to hear it so comfortably. And to see the whole of the house, too. What a spectacle, this! London returning to its own. The King and Queen here any minute. Most of the Royal Family, too. What a greeting for them! Their people who'd served them loyally. All eyes on the Royal Box, waiting to rise to them—and to this occasion. Eyes darting everywhere. Lorgnettes were raised and jewelled heads moved this way and that, bowing, smiling, searching. Christopher opened his programme and noticed that his white glove was dirtier than he had thought, so he held his programme bravely in his left hand and continued to search the auditorium. Fans were moving gently below. The hubbub was ceasing perceptibly now. People were too busy smiling to their friends.

A moment—then all were at attention. The Royal Family appeared in their box. The National Anthem was played as men looked fixedly before them, as on a parade ground; women looking proudly at their Queen. Then a silence; a ruffle of expensive silks as the audience settled down; a shuffle of feet; a sudden dimming of the lights; a round of applause as the conductor appeared from the darkness; a raised baton; nervous coughing from all parts of the building; a deathly silence; a crash—and it had begun!

Christopher took up a position at the back of the box. It was moving, this—deeply moving. His hands were moist beneath his gloves; his collar seemed suddenly tight about his neck. The music, too. It had been Effie's favourite. They had seen it many times together. And Mimi's death in the last act. He had little thought that Effie would die the same way. Yes, it was confoundedly moving. But so were the times. The war was over! Hugh was returning! London *had returned*! . . .

The Barlows dropped him at Princes Gate that night. "A wonderful evening, Christopher, what? Never saw such a distinguished audience. Everybody there. Only hope to goodness the wretched thing takes on. Damned expensive, this opera business."

Marling opened his front door. A telegram lay on the hall table. He picked it up and crossed the tiled floor to his study. There he opened the wire and stood thoughtfully, having read it.

His butler entered.

"Is there anything you're wanting, sir?"

"No, nothing, Jordon—nothing at all."

As Jordon was about to leave, he paused by the door and looked over anxiously at his master. He was standing by the mantelpiece now—his eyes shining; his face flushed.

"Are you sure you're all right, sir?" Jordon asked, coming back into the room.

Marling turned. Then he spoke:

"My son returns to-morrow," he said, the telegram still held tightly in his gloved hands.

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

CHRISTOPHER MARLING sat at the end of the polished table in his long dining-room, twirling his glass by its delicate stem. The candles flickered beneath their crimson shades, reflecting in the polished table on which they stood. Jordon was busy in the darkness behind him.

"I'll wait in here until Mr. Hugh arrives," Marling said. "And better keep something hot for him—in case. Leave his place laid—anyhow."

"Very good, sir."

Marling raised his glass and noticed how the colour blended with the shades of his candelabra. *Taylors* 1900.

"How many bottles have we left of this, Jordon?"

"Two dozen, sir."

Better lay down some more of this port, he thought. Hugh would enjoy it—unless his palate had been ruined by all the cheap stuff he'd drunk in the various messes.

"A pity, sir, Mr. Hugh couldn't arrive in time for dinner," Jordon said, removing the coffee-tray from the side table behind him. "Mrs. Perks took such pains to-night, too, sir."

"Yes, Jordon—yes. Still—there are many dinners ahead of us."

"Yes, sir—that's true."

Jordon moved towards the door, the coffee-tray in his hands.

"And Jordon—see that an electric fire is installed in his bedroom to-morrow. Ring up the electricians. He'll feel the cold a bit after so long in India. Anyhow, remove that paper-fan affair from the grate. He always hated those."

"I will, sir."

Jordon opened the door. In a moment it had closed and Marling was alone. Slowly he clipped the end of his cigar and lighted it. Then he placed the match thoughtfully on his dessert plate and sat back in his chair. Through the haze of his cigar smoke he looked at a portrait that hung at the far end of the room, over the mantelpiece. He looked at it steadily. Yes, Effie—how he wished that she were here this night! So many times they had spoken of Hugh's homecoming. But it was different—so different from the way that they had planned. . . . For a year now, Marling had sat there alone. The place at his right which was now laid for Hugh, had been Effie's. Nightly for nearly thirty years she had sat there, and together they had talked until his cigar was finished. Then they had retired to the drawing-room upstairs, with sometimes a game of cribbage to while away the evening. But for over a year now Marling had sat there alone—and afterwards he had retired to his study to sit in the leather arm-chair that stood by the side of the fireplace. There he had sat with his papers, or book, until Jordon had appeared at ten o'clock with the drinks. Then he had drunk a whisky and soda and almost immediately he had retired to bed. That had been the routine of his life during the last few months. There had been occasions when he had dined out, and when people had dined with him; or when he had given large dinner-parties. But these occasions had been rare. Besides, since the Armistice there had been no one with whom he had especially wished to celebrate. So he had dined alone for the greater part of that time—the Barlows, Greville and old Clements being his most frequent visitors. For Clements he had a sincere regard. Clements had enlisted at the age of fifty-four in one of the Labour Battalions —this after constant refusals owing to his age and failing sight. And he had finished the war as a lieutenant in that unit. Often since his return, Clements had hobbled in to dine with him, being troubled now with most acute attacks of gout. But apart from these few intimates, Marling had remained mostly alone. He had preferred it that way.

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed. Marling found

himself counting. Nine o'clock! He drank again. Yes, there was another hour to wait. But it was pleasant, sitting in here. This was the way he had planned it, too. When he had first heard that Hugh was leaving the boat at Marseilles and was motoring back through France with young Fortescue—and spending a few days in Paris—he had been disappointed. He had hoped that Hugh would arrive on the boat which had already berthed at Tilbury. These extra days seemed unnecessary when he had been away for so long. But on second thoughts Marling had been glad. 'It will do the boy good. Nothing like Paris for livening a man up. Especially after four years abroad. Should myself, by Jove! Good for Hugh!' But he was glad for another reason, too: He did not want to meet Hugh at a railway station. Re-unions like this were occasions when father and son might be a little emotional; if it came to that, an occasion when they might justifiably be so. And both of them shunned these things. It might cast an artificiality over their re-union, as well. The train would have come in; a search of every window as it had passed by; a meeting; a handshake. The passing of meaningless remarks to one another as they had searched for luggage; then a drive back in the taxi with the passing of other meaningless remarks because they had been apart for so long and they would have been making conversation—just as strangers would. No, Marling did not want it that way. But for Hugh to arrive—*home*—in an atmosphere that he knew—that was the way that Marling had planned it. And now that would be possible. They would be meeting now—at dinner. They would sit there round the table in his long dining-room—and begin a new life together; a new friendship. One could talk at dinner; and do things with one's hands; and eat. It would be *natural*, that homecoming; it called in no way for artificiality. It would be as if Hugh had not been away at all. They would pick up the threads right away then. They would—to-night. That delay over getting the car through the customs was perhaps as well. Hugh had said in his second telegram that he would be arriving about ten. Well—he would just be in time for the port. Marling enjoyed his after-

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GOVT. GIRLS COLLEGE SIRSA

dinner cigar and his port. He looked forward to sitting there for many years to come—talking to Hugh after dinner, over their port. That was the time for conversation, too; it was then that men gave of their best—and flung aside their reserve. Yes, that was a good beginning. . . . Now, presently he would hear the knock at the front door, and a ring—the brass plate requested callers to do both. Jordon would cross the tiled hall to open it—he would hear Jordon's footsteps as he walked. Then a muffled conversation; more footsteps on the tiles of his hall. The dining-room door would open—and what? *Ah, what?* Marling felt the blood already rushing to his cheeks. Ah, what? Nothing forced about it, anyhow. Have to behave as if Hugh were returning—perhaps from his chambers after a day at the Temple. Marling looked about the room. Must have no stupid sentimentality about this. . . . The cigars—yes. He rose unsteadily from his chair and fetched them from the sideboard, placing them carefully on the right of Hugh's place. Yes—that was a good idea. Then the door would open. Marling would rise from his chair. 'Ah Hugh—delighted to see you, my boy! How are you? Sit down. Port? Here it is. The cigars are on your right.' . . . Yes, that was the right beginning. . . .

And they'd talk. Yes, they'd talk into the early hours of the morning, maybe. He remembered the last time that they had spoken together. But that had been four years ago and even then Hugh had insisted that neither he nor Effie should go to the station to see him off. Yes, Hugh had always hated sentiment; or occasions that called for the display of one's emotions. But it was settled now; Hugh would be arriving in less than an hour at his home, and it was going to be natural, that homecoming—as if all this nightmare had never been.

Again Marling raised his glass; again he looked at Orpen's picture at the far end of the room, almost obscured now by the haze of his cigar smoke. Effie! He wished above all else that she were here this night. So gentle, so understanding, so real. . . . He looked again; and drank hurriedly. . . . This wouldn't do, he thought. No,

he must be gay—jolly—natural, too. And there were going to be no stupid 'Father and son' relations between them; so many parents ruined things that way. No, Hugh was going to take Effie's place now—although that would never really be taken. But he and Hugh were going to share everything together. That was the main thing. And Hugh must realize that this was his home. He must do as he would there—ask his friends to dine; to stay. Young Fortescue, for example. Evidently a well-to-do young fellow, that—having the car sent down to Marseilles to meet him. Yes, and the house would need doing up as well. Nothing seemed to have altered since Marling had taken possession of it thirty years before. The curtains in the drawing-room were the ones that Effie had chosen—even before Hugh had gone to his prep. school. Yes, he'd discuss it all with Hugh. There were many things to discuss with Hugh.

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked steadily. The minutes dragged by. Marling found his heart thumping against his shirt-front, but in faster time than the ticking of that marble clock on the mantelpiece. Once again he filled his glass. This was an occasion, this. An occasion that he had looked forward to for so long. It wasn't quite as he had planned—no, it wasn't quite like that. But Effie would understand. . . . The only lights in his room now were the candelabra on his table, but he could still see her—far in the distance. How well he remembered their first conversations about Hugh. Before he had been born she had said: "I hope we have a son, dear, and if we do, I want to call him Christopher, too." And they had argued about it. The mix-ups there would be over correspondence when he grew up; the advisability of having Christopher as a second name. Marling had wanted to call him 'Hugh,' after his own father. 'Hugh Christopher Marling,' if she insisted. That would dispose of the difficulty over letters, too—the variation in the initials. So they had referred to him as 'Hugh Christopher' long before he had been born, and one October day in 1894 a son had been born to them. And as time went on 'Hugh Christopher' had grown to become Hugh.

Happy days! He re-lived the whole of them again. Hugh's childhood; his schooldays; how he had settled down immediately to the study of the law. And of how one day in August, 1914, Hugh had come to him: "Dad, I've joined up."

A blow that, coming so suddenly. But Marling was proud, deucedly proud. Not a word had been spoken of it; Hugh had just enlisted. From the Inns of Court he had graduated as a second-lieutenant in the 4th Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment. He had friends there and had refused a commission in the Guards which had been offered him. "I'd rather be with Thomas and Plender, Dad," he had said. But they, with so many others, had been killed. News came through in 1915—in the early days of Mesopotamia. The three of them had been in action together. Dark days, those. The telegrams from the War Office which he hardly dared open. But it was only a wound. Worrying enough, anyway. Effie had gone to St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, he remembered. She used to go there every morning; she would just drop in when she was shopping that way. Even he had found himself praying more devoutly than was his custom, at those times, although he was always a sincere churchman. . . . More telegrams. Hugh was recovered and on his way to India to convalesce. A return to Mesopotamia once more. Anxieties. The thrill of his letters which he could almost repeat by heart this very night. . . . "*I'm returning to-morrow. I can't help feeling glad about it. My company's had a bad time. I'm gazetted Captain now. I'll get a Company when I get back. More, if the poor devils have been through it again. Young Jeffries commanded the Battalion for over a month, and was only* 26. *He had awful bad luck. I was so fond of him. You remember him, Dad, don't you? I fagged for him my first term. Still, we're getting on. Kut's retaken. We're on our way to Baghdad now. I only hope I'm there when we take that, too. I'll have to hurry if I am . . .*"

Grand letters he wrote! Marling kept them all in the top right-hand drawer of the desk in his study. More telegrams. Another wound. Slight this time; in the fleshy part of his left arm. Lucky that; it wouldn't

affect his games. Again a return to India. . . . "*Maude was a wonder, Dad. I never hope to serve under a better General. Terribly sad, his death. The whole army was staggered. But then, he had his ambition; he took Baghdad. For a man as inspired as he was, it must have been wonderful to die—having attained one's ambition. I hope I go back to the same hospital. Colaba is wonderful. It lies on a point outside Bombay. The sea is on three sides of it. One sits all day on the balconies that run all round and one looks out to the sea. Ships pass by all the time—hospital ships in plenty. But they're lucky chaps, those. You've no idea how good it is to get on board one of those ships after the dirt and dust out here. We even get tray-cloths when they bring us our tea! That is, if we're cot cases. I shan't be this time. But still, this wound won't take long. I'll be back soon. . . .*"

Grand letters, those! And the one that gave him more comfort than any. ". . . *I'm at Simla, as you see. General Brocklehurst is commanding here and has asked me to be his A.D.C. A bit of an honour, I suppose, and he's a first-class chap. He did awfully well in France before coming out East. But I don't want to leave the other fellows out there, and I'm in rather a quandary. Of course, there are only three of the old ones left—Gorlick, Summers and Thornton. But the new fellows are splendid and one gets awfully attached to people under those conditions. I wouldn't like them to think I'd deserted them for a cushy job. But the General just tells me it's fixed. So there we are! When I leave here I expect I'll go to him. . . .*"

And then his last letter. ". . . *I've been away nearly four years. So Fortescue and I—he's the fellow I told you about, (you'll like him immensely, Dad)—are doing our damnedest to get out. Fortescue because he's been left some property in the New Forest and wants to have a look at it (some vague relation he's never seen), and I, because I want to see you. And his idea is that if we can get away together, we'll get off the boat at Marseilles where a car of his with chauffeur will be waiting for us, and we'll drive back together through France. Gerald Fortescue used to be out there. He's a gunner. He wants to look up some of the old places—his gun positions and so on. Then we'll stay in Paris for a bit and I'll wire you the rest. . . .*"

Marling looked over again at the clock that stood on the

mantelpiece under Effie's picture. It was nine-fifty now. He looked for the cigars. Yes, they were in position. And the port—the decanter was nearly full. He looked, too, to the candles and moved each shade down by about three inches.

A bell rang.

Marling finished the last shade and returned to his chair. The noise of the bell seemed to re-echo through the entire house.

He listened. Would Jordon never answer that bell? Confound the fellow! Why couldn't he hurry? Yes, there he was. Crossing the tiled hall now! Marling steadied himself. He must be calm. Yes. Just as if Hugh were returning from some city dinner. Casual almost; infernally natural; as if this happened every night.

The front door opened. Muffled conversation. Yes, he'd be found sitting. He'd get up when the door opened. He was just finishing dinner. No fuss about it. Hugh had always hated fuss. . . . Feet walking in the hall. . . . The door opened.

"Mr. Hugh, sir."

Marling gripped the arm of his chair with both hands and sprang to his feet. His face seemed flushed, Jordon thought. Might have been the reflection from the candle shades. But this was an occasion when Jordon should retire quickly. "It's all the old boy's got left," he had said to Mrs. Perks. "A great night for the old boy, this." Come to that, it was for all of them.

Marling's hand was outstretched. "Ah, Hugh!" he said, a little unsteadily, Jordon thought. "Delighted to see you, my boy. How are you? Sit down. Port? Here it is. The cigars are on your right."

When Jordon returned again at eleven-thirty to inquire of to-morrow's orders, he found them still seated there. A haze of cigar smoke encircling them; the decanter nearly empty. And in that manner he had left them again and had crossed the tiled hall to his quarters.

CHAPTER II

"AH, come in, Hugh!" Marling removed his horn-rimmed spectacles with his right hand and rose from his leather arm-chair.

"I'm sorry to be going out to-night, Dad."

"Not a bit, my boy. Not a bit. Delighted."

"I wouldn't have left you—only Fortescue goes back to-morrow."

"Of course, my boy. Quite understand. I've got some papers to read through, anyway. Will you be late?"

"No. We're dining at the club quietly."

"Good. I'll still be up, I expect."

"Righto!"

"Remember me to young Fortescue," Marling called as he returned to his chair. "A nice young fellow, that. Ask him to stop here next time he's up. Like to have him."

"I'll tell him, Dad. He'd like to, I know."

"I've rung for a taxi," Jordon said, as Hugh met him in the hall.

"Thank you, Jordon."

"Will you be late, sir?" he called.

"No, about eleven, Jordon."

The butler bowed; Hugh entered the taxi.

"The Bath Club," he said.

The taxi swung presently along Knightsbridge. In a short time it was rumbling over Piccadilly's then uneven surface and shortly it turned into Dover Street, pulling up on the left-hand side. Hugh found Fortescue in the Smoking-room. They drank a sherry before going in to dinner. Then they ordered their food and talked of the day's happenings. Fortescue had motored down to St. George's and had played golf.

"Hot, wasn't it, Gerald?"

"Damned hot!"

And Hugh had told him the happenings of the last few days. Then presently he said, as he pulled out a flat watch

from his waistcoat pocket: "Do you see this watch, Gerald?"

"I say. That's a beauty! Where did you get that?"

"You'd never guess."

Fortescue examined it carefully. "I've never seen anything so thin. I can't think how it works, Hugh." Then he added smilingly, "I suppose it does?"

"It certainly works," Hugh said.

"Well, come on! What's the story?"

"Open the back," Hugh said, still looking at it as it lay in his friend's hand.

Fortescue looked up. "Very mysterious, Hugh. What's the idea?"

"Open it," Hugh said again.

Fortescue did so and looked inside. He frowned. 'H.M. from B.B.,' he mused. Then looking up he said quickly: "Barbara?"

"Yes—we're engaged."

Fortescue closed the watch and handed it back. "Oh," he said. That was all.

"You don't seem pleased?"

A silence.

"A bit of a staggerer that, Hugh. I'd no idea."

"But surely, Gerald. You can't mind. I mean . . ."

"Oh, me?" Fortescue laughed. "Oh, I've no interest, if that's what you mean. Nothing like that." He was suddenly making lines on the table-cloth with his fork.

"I don't understand," Hugh said. "You, Barbara and I . . . ?"

Fortescue looked up. "Of course!"

"You're not in love with her yourself?"

After a second's consideration: "No."

"Then why, Gerald, do you take it like this?"

"Why didn't you tell me before?" was Fortescue's answer.

"I couldn't. This is the first chance I've had."

"But surely—out there, on the boat—since we've been back. . . ."

"This is the first chance I've had," Hugh repeated.

Another pause. The waiter took their empty plates away. "And to follow, sir?"

Suddenly: "Oh—anything! Something cold!"

"And you, sir?"

"Oh—I don't know. The same," Hugh found himself answering, lamely.

Presently Fortescue said: "Before you left, were you engaged then?"

"No."

"You intended to be?"

"I hoped."

"Couldn't you have told me?"

Hugh looked thoughtfully at the cold meat he found before him. "Men," he said, "don't talk of those things beforehand, Gerald. Besides, I might have been turned down."

"Then, when did this happen?"

"On the boat."

"But she wasn't there. She didn't even come to see us off."

"I know. I wrote."

"Before the boat sailed?"

"Yes."

Another silence.

"What does 'Old Christopher' say?"

"He doesn't know—yet."

"Will he mind?"

"He'll love Barbara."

"When are you marrying?"

"That's the difficulty. How can I? I've no money."

"But 'Old Christopher' will fork out?"

"Damn it, Gerald! That's it. My allowance won't keep the two of us. And it's charity, anyway. One can't marry on *that*."

A silence.

"But you'll be earning something soon?"

"Soon! Damn it, I'm not called yet! Shan't be for over a year. And then for about five years I'll be earning just enough to keep myself in cigarettes or tobacco—if I'm lucky."

Another silence. Then:

"In that case, Hugh, it seems a little foolhardy."

Hugh replaced the watch in his waistcoat pocket and picked up his knife and fork. How flat this reception—how different from all he had imagined! Gerald and Barbara had been his best friends out there. They rode together, daily. And Barbara was wonderful on a horse. No game of polo was complete without Barbara; she was there always; watching, applauding. And her criticisms at the end—"You played like a foot, Hugh! As for you, Gerald, I'll have to teach you to ride first!" And if they had played well; her obvious enthusiasm which she could never keep properly controlled; her pride in both of them; the open frankness of their relations. Inseparable almost, the three of them. They had been like this for over a year.

"What made you write from the boat—like that?"

"I don't know, Gerald. I felt leaving a bit, I suppose. A sudden realization. It seemed to hurt more than usual. I don't know. . . ."

"Yes," Fortescue said slowly, "it usually does hurt—then."

They ate silently, mostly toying with their food.

"You're sure you're not—well, angry, disappointed, Gerald? You sound it."

"Do I, Hugh? Sorry. No, it's a damned good show." Gerald went on eating slowly.

Hugh had visualized a bumper of champagne. Toastings; congratulations; talks over old times. It was an occasion, the first time one announced a thing like this. And Gerald had to be the first to be told. How odd, this dinner! How unlike all that he had imagined as he had driven to the club that evening. He had pictured Gerald —"You old devil! *God*, it's a good show!" That was the way he always congratulated Hugh. And the blood seemed to run to his large red ears so that they positively glowed on those occasions. He always fingered those ears, too. A curious movement of the fingers which seemed to be pressing them flush with his cheeks; as if he knew that they were too large and was unconsciously massaging them to a normal position—making them less obtrusive. One hand was doing that now, as the elbow rested on the table. His freckled face looked solemn.

"Gerald," Hugh said, "you've rather spoilt it all."

Fortescue looked up.

"I suppose I *am* like a bear with a sore head. Perhaps it's the break-up of—we three."

"But Barbara's coming over." Hopefully: "She'll be here soon now! Then we'll all be together!"

"Yes—of course," Gerald said, still stroking that ear. And then: "Don't think I'm depressed for myself, Hugh. It isn't that. It's just . . ."

"What?"

"Oh!"—and then a movement as if of annoyance. "I seem in a black mood to-night. I can't find words."

Presently Hugh said: "You think Barbara and I will —be happy?"

A moment's pause, then: "You were out there, weren't you?"

"Gerald, old boy. I've never been as happy as that."

"Then isn't that your answer? Have you finished?"

Together they walked out of the dining-room. Hugh insisted on paying the bill.

"Two coffees and two brandies," Hugh said to a passing waiter in the Smoking-Room downstairs. Together they sat on a big leather settee by the wall. A curious silence seemed to have fallen over them. "And cigars," Hugh added to the waiter, as he brought the first order.

They talked commonplaces. Gerald's round of golf; Hugh's meeting with Gordon Fraser, whose chambers he was entering. But of the thing that was on both their minds they had spoken nothing.

Presently: "It's so damned unfair, Gerald!"

"What?" Fortescue was almost lying on the settee, his feet outstretched.

"It seems all wrong to say to 'Old Christopher,' 'If I marry, will you keep us?' It amounts to that. I can't marry on what I've got."

"Yes," Fortescue said, trying to emulate Hugh's smoke rings, equally unsuccessfully. "I suppose so. But you've an allowance. Ask him to increase it. He won't mind. He'd do anything for you."

"I can't do that."

"If you don't—what then?"

Hugh shifted uneasily.

"It's odd," he said. "Before I left—when I wrote even—all this never occurred to me. But seeing 'Old Christopher' again has made a devil of a difference. He's so good to me. I can't ask for more."

"And if you don't?" Fortescue was still immobile.

"It's off. Everything is. Unless I chuck the Bar and find a job."

"'Old Christopher' wouldn't like that—would he?"

"No."

A silence.

"It's hard to advise you, Hugh," Fortescue said presently. "In your case I'm afraid I shouldn't have any scruples. After all, you are all your father has left. Everything he has is bound to come to you eventually. I don't see why he shouldn't settle some on you now. After all, he wants you to go to the Bar. He knows how long it takes. He's not a man who hasn't considered every side of it. If you want to marry, and your father approves—well, it seems pretty obvious to me. Go and tell him."

Hugh sat thoughtfully.

"Yes," he said, "that's the obvious thing in obvious circumstances. But 'Old Christopher's' not like an ordinary parent. He just gives all the time. He'd give me all he had—if I asked. That's what makes it more difficult."

"Well," Fortescue said, "I've said my say. Further than that I can't help. Of course, you're sure of yourself?"

"Never surer, Gerald."

"And Barbara? Are you sure of her?"

Hugh sat upright and looked at his friend. "Why do you ask that?" he said. "You know her as well as I do. If she says a thing, Gerald, she sticks to it. And she missed a mail before replying. She'd thought it over a lot before giving her answer."

"Yes," Fortescue said, absently. "I suppose so."

Another silence; more smoke rings; more fidgeting on Hugh's part; Fortescue remaining unmoved, puffing his cigar smoke into rings, his feet outstretched.

A page arrived.

"You're wanted on the telephone, sir."

"Me? All right. Shan't be a moment, Hugh."

But Hugh said: "I think I'll be going, Gerald."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know." And then as an afterthought: "'Old Christopher's' alone."

"I see."

Both stood up awkwardly.

"Well, walk with me to the box, anyway."

Hugh did so, taking Fortescue's arm, as of habit. But there was a difference, an obvious difference. It was strained and unnatural.

"I'm afraid," Hugh said, outside the telephone box, "my news has upset you, Gerald. I'm damned sorry."

"Nonsense, Hugh."

"If I thought this caused you any unhappiness, Gerald, I believe I'd call it off."

"I believe you would." And then: "No, I'm happy enough." For the first time, almost a return to his old self. "Well, don't forget you're coming down to Crossways."

"I'd like to—awfully."

And then a return to the reserved; spoken jerkily: "Good night, Hugh. Good luck. I mean that." Then he disappeared into the telephone box.

Hugh collected his hat and walked out of the club. All his enthusiasm seemed suddenly to have vanished. And the more he thought it over, the more convinced he became that Gerald was angry, upset, disappointed. And if his marriage should interfere with this friendship of his? How damnable that would be! How perfectly damnable! But he loved Barbara. That was all he knew. And he had realized it more as the days of separation had gone by. When a man lives almost in a man's house—arranging the many details that an A.D.C.'s work entails, it is not unnatural that he should become intimate, and with every member of that household. And when one of them was Barbara—enthusiastic, athletic, musical, intelligent and last but not least, infernally attractive—it is not unnatural that a man should become, or want to become, infernally

intimate with that person called Barbara. But Barbara had been aloof at first. She was surrounded always by every man in the Station. Her position as G.O.C.'s daughter was sufficient in itself. But Barbara had a magnetism that drew people to her; a personality of her own. And when she had accepted Hugh—and had returned his friendship—hadn't he been rightly proud? Of course, she had known Gerald longer. She had called him Gerald whilst she was still addressing Hugh as Captain Marling. He remembered that he used to wish that that hadn't been so. It wasn't that he was jealous; it was just that he had longed to be one of that select circle that were Barbara's intimates. And those 'intimates' had eventually dwindled to two before the year was out—Gerald and himself. The others existed—the hundreds of people who passed through the General's house at tennis-parties, tea-parties, dinner-parties. But they had never enjoyed the intimacies that were Gerald's and his. These three were called 'The Three Musketeers.' 'Diana,' some called Barbara, but Gerald and Hugh had decided that there were too many 'Dianas' in the world. It savoured of cheap novelettes, too. No, 'Barbara' was good enough for them.

And so life had gone on, day after day, week after week. The hot sunshine; the beautifully cool nights. The dancing to the gramophone; the dancing to the Regimental bands when official dances were held. Hugh was a good dancer; Gerald was not. But that part hadn't mattered. They always found intense pleasure in booking their dances beforehand, and in vieing with each other to be favoured with more than the other. But Barbara had made it a rule that both were to be treated equally. There was to be no favouritism in 'The Three Musketeers.' They could choose whether they would have the foxtrots or the waltzes, and there was the programme marked with those at their disposal. And if Gerald didn't mind awfully, she'd rather have the waltzes with Hugh, because Gerald was so clumsy. But there was to be no favouritism. There never had been after she had once dropped the 'Captain Marling.' They were always Hugh and Gerald—and she, Barbara. He thought of those days. The deep blue of

the sky above him reminded him forcibly of them. The sky was not black to-night; it possessed the same Eastern tinge. The warmth, too. The slight rustle of the trees on the opposite side of Piccadilly. It was on such a night as this that he had said good-bye to her, not two months before. They had sat in deck-chairs in the garden at the farthest point from the General's house. Large cactus plants screened them from prying eyes.

"And so you go to-morrow, Hugh?" she had said.

"Yes, Barbara. I didn't think I'd mind. But I do."

"So do I," she had answered. "I don't know what I'll do without you and Gerald." And then she had lighted a cigarette and Hugh had seen, suddenly—in that short moment whilst she held the lighted match to her cigarette, that she was miserable—unhappy. It seemed to happen after she had finished speaking.

Hugh had taken her hand.

"We'll all meet again, Barbara," he had said. "We'll carry on 'The Three Musketeers' at home. The General won't stay out here always. He says he wants to retire, anyway. And then we'll all be together again. The time will soon pass."

But Barbara had not been so easily reassured.

"And Hugh," she had said, later, "you will be the one that I'll *really* miss."

That had been the beginning. He had taken her in his arms then and kissed her. They had stood together there, hidden by the cactus plants, and had told each other of things they had both felt for a long time, but which had not been discussed or made open before.

And Barbara had clung to him as they stood there, as if to keep him from going away—for ever.

"We must go in, dear," he had said, later, smoothing down her ruffled hair.

Presently she had led him to some hidden place near the verandah where they were alone again for one short moment before returning inside. "I'm glad you're tall," she had whispered then. "I like looking up at you when you hold me like that. I think I look up to you in *every* way, Hugh."

And then their meeting with Gerald.

"Where the devil have you been?"

"Looking at the stars, naughty boy," Barbara had answered. "Seeing if they've anything to tell us."

Fortescue had some vague theory about stars. A shooting star at a given moment could foretell amazing things. They had always chaffed him about it. But Hugh had felt—then—that he should have told Gerald. Keeping something back with the relationship existing between 'The Three Musketeers' seemed wrong. But what could he say? 'Barbara has kissed me in the garden?' No, he couldn't mention that—ever. Men couldn't talk like that about women who mattered. And Barbara mattered terribly. So he had said nothing. Then he had left sadly for Bombay, but by the time he had reached the boat, he had felt that he could contain himself no longer. So he had written to her and had had it posted for him on land before sailing. In it he had explained everything; of how he had loved her for so long in his heart, but in fear of losing the friendship she offered, he had remained silent. Of his hopes, his ambitions, she knew all. They had discussed them so often together. He could not offer her much, he had explained, but he offered it sincerely. An odd letter, he had thought, as he had stuck down the envelope; cramped; stilted; different. Usually his pen flowed, but he had thought each word out carefully before committing that letter to paper; and he had torn up two before finally sealing the envelope.

The journey home. 'Two Musketeers' they were now. And they often discussed their absent companion. But Hugh noticed the apparently masculine way Gerald spoke of her. "A damned good sport, Barbara!" Just as if she were one of them—sexually. That part seemed to make no difference to Gerald. He never enlarged upon things that other men did when speaking of her; of her fair, almost golden hair; the ovalness of her face; the set of her eyes which peered, blue as an Indian sky, from beneath long lashes, and sparkled, too, as she spoke, expressing each and every mood. The elegance of her figure; the neatness of her ankles; the suppleness of her fingers; the divine movements of her hands. When Barbara had

put her arm around Hugh, as she had done frequently in pure cameraderie, her long fingers had seemed to caress everything that they touched. Hugh had noticed this in his 'Captain Marling' days. That was why he had been so indescribably thrilled when those hands had first caressed him. But Gerald's one and only comment had been, "What funny hands Barbara has! They're never still."

No, he couldn't tell Gerald then. Besides, what was there to tell? Then the last mail had come. This watch, too. And the last paragraph of her letter. "*So I'll be sailing on the next boat but one. This watch, dear, will count the hours for you till I come.*"

And now he had told Gerald. . . . It hadn't gone as he had hoped.

He walked down the slope of Piccadilly, past the Cavalry Club. Then crossing the bottom of Park Lane, he saw by the clock at the corner that it was only nine-thirty. Nine-thirty! And this was the evening he had looked forward to! Telling Gerald! All the week he had looked forward to that. The bumper of champagne had now become a nightmare instead. Most people were still dining. In the ordinary way, he and Gerald would have been in the dining-room still. Yet here was he—walking home! The evening was over. It had been a failure. He found himself walking slowly, as if his feet were leaden. And he could not go home yet; it was too early. 'Old Christopher' would wonder. And his mood, too. He must certainly get rid of that. He'd walk. Through the Park, too. He wanted to get away from the traffic; the noise. He might sit there a while. In the dark one sees things in proper perspective. Yes, he'd walk and try and adjust things as he walked. He seemed suddenly to have lost touch with London—and all that it held. Out there he would have gone to one of the Messes now, and would have talked to his friends. Here he seemed to have no friends. They were all dead—or he had not yet re-found them. For three weeks, now, he had lived entirely with 'Old Christopher,' and 'Old Christopher's' friends. Good fellows, all of them. But it wasn't the same.

He entered the Park at Hyde Park Corner. Once inside

he turned left and walked slowly along the path. Thomas, Plender, Jeffries, Gorlick, Summers, Thornton—they were all gone now. With the exception of the last two they were dead. And Gerald, a friend he had made since he had been away, had changed. It wasn't so much that he had changed now, but it was obvious that he would eventually change through Hugh's marriage with Barbara. And that had to be. Of course it had.

Yes, 'Old Christopher' seemed all that he had left. It was sad to think of that. And yet, as he walked, he realized what a tremendous thing his father had suddenly become in his life, making up almost for the gap that the others had left. Their relations had changed so with his return. Before, his father had been a parent. Now he accepted Hugh as a friend, an equal, and discussed things with him on that level. Uncle Henry, for example. "I think it's damned bad form, Hugh. Only applied for his arms recently, and now he plasters his cars with them! What do you think, boy?"

And Hugh had answered, "I'm not surprised, Dad. He had the largest houseboat at Henley one year, and filled it with the most amazingly vulgar people."

"You remember that, Hugh?"

"Of course I do, Dad. Wasn't I sent to bed for calling one of them an old pig?"

"Good for you, Hugh! Good for you! And he was, too, if I remember!"

That was their relationship. 'Old Christopher' laughed now. Yet he had been infinitely shocked at that time, which had troubled Hugh considerably, for his respect for his father amounted then almost to a fear.

In this park this very Sunday morning, they had sat, 'Old Christopher' resplendent in a grey top-hat, and had watched the people passing in their leisurely walk. Marling had always a word of interest. It was so knowledgeable, his companionship. When he spoke of things they were things worth speaking of. And when he spoke of them, one learnt some new thing about them; some new thing that would occur to no other man to tell—yet of an infinite interest which seemed to have been discovered

by him alone. The houses opposite to them in Park Lane; who had lived there; the pictures they contained; the painted ceilings and who had painted them. It was not like the idle gossip of old ladies who delight in the pedigrees of Royal Families—it was of real interest. And told in a manner that commanded attention. It was charming, this new-found friendship. It seemed to Hugh as though his father had spent his entire lifetime collecting information with but one idea in his mind—to pass it on to his son and to him alone. Yet it was strange, unexpected. He had never imagined it that way.

And his name—'Old Christopher.' That was how he was known amongst members of the family. Uncle Henry had started it. His father had been 'Old Christopher' to Hugh in the days when he lived in fear of him and when the name had meant the same to him then as the nicknames of his housemasters—'Old Nick,' 'Old Buck,' for Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Buchanan. And 'Old Christopher' was another to be feared. He had stood for law and order, too. Yet even in those days Hugh remembered giving Harold a cuffing for daring to speak of his father in that manner. "Uncle Christopher, to you!" he had said, adding venom with the toe of his boot. But 'Old Christopher' was now a term of affection.

He remembered discussing him with Gerald over a year ago, just after his mother had died.

"Of course," Gerald had said, "that always breaks up a home, Hugh. It did when my mother died. And when my father died at Ypres—of course, it broke it up completely. But he never could handle me, anyway."

And Hugh had answered: "But 'Old Christopher's' different. He's terribly reserved. He never says much. But it's there, our affection. We both know it. But we both prefer to keep quiet about it. Frankly, I couldn't be affectionate with my father. That is, openly. I just respect him, rather from a distance."

"And he?" Gerald had asked.

"Well, I'm just an untrained colt. I was born when my parents were older than usual. I expect he thinks me rather an enigma."

Funny, that conversation. It had turned out so differently. Everything seemed to be different. Even Gerald.

He was passing the Barracks. A sentry stood on guard outside. Unconsciously Hugh prepared to take the salute. But he realized that that was different, too. He was a soldier no longer. He walked slowly by.

And his future? He had given up soldiering. With his allowance and the General's influence he could have had a good job, now. And lived well, too. He could have married, then. It was different out there. He had, instead, decided to come home and go to the Bar, and he realized now that his earning capacity was nil. And that it would be nil for some years to come. And he had asked Barbara to marry him. . . . Gerald was upset about it.

The fact that he was entirely dependent on 'Old Christopher' troubled him, and to ask him for a larger allowance—as he would have to do—seemed the most humiliating thing he had yet done. How odd, this world! Out there his friends had regarded him as comfortably off. He had, and could have, all the things that he saw and wanted. His ponies had always been better than other people's. Even Gerald's. The small things, too. And now he was useless; he didn't contribute; he was a parasite; a sponger. He dreaded having to ask 'Old Christopher.' The only thing he saw in it would be his father's evident delight in Barbara. He would love her. He couldn't help that. She would bring an added happiness into his life. He could see them together. "Will 'Old Christopher' like me?" Barbara had asked. And Hugh had answered, "My father's respect for women is beyond description. His manners belong to a different world—the world which used to believe in manners. Women who belong to his own family are like Cæsar's wife. They are quite perfect. He'll adore you." Yes, that was the only thing. 'Old Christopher' couldn't help being happy about it—really. Barbara would play to him. The piano in their drawing-room hadn't been touched for years. He would have to have it seen to. Then she could amuse him; play cribbage with him in the winter evenings, too. Hugh saw it

all. Yes, there was always that. That lessened his task. There would be some return for it, anyway. . . .

"Go and tell him," Gerald had said. Yes, he must do that. This secret could be kept from him no longer. But even the joy of telling was lessened now, after seeing Gerald. Yet apart from the unpleasantness of financial discussions, Hugh had always looked forward to telling his father about Barbara. The way she handled a horse. That would please the old boy. He would like to tell him, too, about her hands; the way they moved. But perhaps he wouldn't understand that. That was a thing, too, that Hugh would always enjoy alone; he couldn't really share a thing like that. That was part of Barbara; a part that belonged to Hugh. There were other things, too—the slimness of her waist, her almost boyish figure, her grace. She was elegant always. It was an elegance that excited; it was never statuesque or cold. Her every movement was to Hugh a source of physical pleasure. Yet it was never uncontrolled. He just watched her—and became alive. And presently she would cease whatever she was doing and come over to Hugh. Every fibre in his body seemed to react then. He could feel the blood rush to his cheeks. And because they were near then, he watched the movements of her face, the whiteness of her teeth. He saw in her eyes pools that were fathoms deep. He often wondered what thoughts lay behind those eyes. But she had told him now. Those thoughts were for him. . . . He couldn't tell 'Old Christopher' *just* how things were. That wouldn't be fair, either. He could only tell him of more external things—things that were external to his innermost thoughts. They were not the things that had made Hugh love Barbara so desperately, but they were the things that would show his father how right he was. Yes, he must talk to his father without delay. Doing that would clear the air. It was wrong to have kept it from him so long. It might also get rid of this infernal depression which had settled upon him.

He turned out of the Park and crossed the road. Yes, he was glad that he was going to tell 'Old Christopher.' After all, it meant a daughter for him, too, and he knew

that they had always wanted a daughter. His mother had told him. It had been a disappointment when Hugh had remained the only child.

A gust of wind sprang up. The boughs of the trees swayed, shaking their leaves with a sudden violence. Hugh looked up. It was clouding over. A thunderstorm—he wondered? He hurried his steps. At the door of No. 87 he paused and drew out his latch-key. He looked up again. Yes, there was a storm brewing. Then it became still. He saw lightning in the distance.

He shuddered, but knew not why. This gloom. But he was going to tell 'Old Christopher' now. That would clear the air. The coming thunder would clear the air outside, too. It had been sultry all day. His thoughts to-night were like that; they lacked the coolness of a spring morning—his usual self. He put the key into the lock. A burst of thunder came from afar. He listened as the distant rumblings faded away.

"I hope you had a good dinner, sir," Jordon said, appearing as he always did, as if from nowhere.

"I did, Jordon." Hugh put his top-hat on the table. "My father up?"

"In his study, sir."

Hugh entered.

"Ah, Hugh! Home early. How's young Fortescue?"

"He's all right," Hugh answered, and laid his hand affectionately on his father's shoulder as he sat in his leather arm-chair. Then seeing him engrossed in something that had been hurriedly turned over as he entered, "And what are you up to, Dad?"

"To tell you the truth, my boy, I didn't mean you to see. Didn't expect you home yet. Truth is, Hugh, I'm thinking of buying a place."

"How do you mean?"

"Somewhere for you and me, boy. You know—week-ends and all that. You'll want your hunting. Tennis in the summer, too. Found just the place. Not too far out. Thought you and I could just do with a place like that. Ask your friends down, too. Young Fortescue, for example. Nice young fellow, that. Here's a photograph. Look!"

Hugh took the photograph.

No, he thought. . . . My father doesn't want a place in the country. . . .

"Of course, it wants doing up, I should say. Hasn't been lived in for two years."

"Yes," Hugh said, "it's lovely, Dad."

Hugh handed the photograph back. A lump had come suddenly into his throat. . . . No, he couldn't talk after all. . . .

CHAPTER III

THE offices of Marling and Mortimer were in King Street, St. James's. They were round the corner from Marling's club, which he found of great use to him. Unlike so many of its members, he was seen to lunch there most days, unless he was lunching his clients, when he always took them to the Carlton Hotel—for Christopher Marling was a man who seldom altered what had once become a habit. He had an instinctive dislike for new waiters; he liked the same table and the same faces around him. He hated lengthy explanations; he hated fuss.

His offices were on the first and second floors and he was striving hard to find more accommodation. The original Mortimer had died, but a son and a nephew of his old partner had since taken his place. Together they worked seriously and amicably. George Mortimer and Claud Buxton were eminently suitable. People had wondered why Marling had not thought of taking Hugh into the practice. He had always spoken of his son going to the Bar. That was because it had been Marling's own ambition to be at the Bar, and in the same way he wanted it for Hugh. It was that fundamental 'snobbishness' that we all possess. 'Hugh Marling, K.C.' meant so much more to the world than 'Hugh Marling, Solicitor.' And with the practice behind him, Hugh would have a tremendous asset—a steady source of income, as Greville had pointed out to Marling, but which Marling knew for himself without being told.

His chief clerk, Benson, had been with him nearly thirty years, and most of his other staff a proportionately long time —for people who worked for Marling, and worked well, never left him because they found their respect grew to an admiration, and that admiration into a strong bond of affection. And then they became part and parcel of his life.

" Mr. Marling is engaged, sir, and cannot be disturbed," was often on Benson's lips, authorized and otherwise. And mostly ' otherwise ' because Benson took things very much into his own hands. If he thought that his employer was working too hard, he relieved him of further exertion by the glibness of his tongue. " In any case," as he would say, " it isn't as if I'm turning a good client away. They always come back—when Mr. Marling is fit enough to see them."

The discipline in Marling and Mortimer's offices was strict. Office hours were of paramount importance. Marling himself arrived at ten, and any variation was usually on the right side. And any variations on the part of the staff were dealt with by Benson. " Mr. Marling can get here in time, so why, pray, shouldn't you, I'd like to know ? " And after the usual and threadworn explanations, he would adjust his pince-nez and affect an air of severe gravity and say, in a slightly affected voice—the voice he affected with his own children—" Then kindly see to it that it does not occur again, Mr. So-and-so ! " Another method was to count up the number of minutes that they were late and multiply it by 300, which he considered to be the number of working days in the year, and confront them with a figure of lost hours on that basis, which was terrifyingly prodigious.

The offices themselves were really unsuitable for their purpose. Adam houses do not turn efficiently into office accommodation, although they make up for that by the atmosphere they exude. Nevertheless, they were extremely comfortable. The thick pile carpet up the staircases and in the partners' rooms, the massive mahogany furniture, the Adam ceilings and the mantelpieces gave to the two suites an air of dignity and security—typifying the manner

in which they conducted their clients' affairs and the return they gave to them in exchange for their fees.

On a particularly bright Monday morning in July 1919, Marling rang for his clerk.

"Benson," he said, sitting back in his chair, the tips of his long fingers together. "That house at Marlow. How long is the option?"

"Thursday, sir, I think."

"My son thinks it's an extravagance."

"Well, sir—I should hardly call it that."

"No. Curious, isn't it—from the younger generation, too? They seem to think only of spending to-day."

"They do, sir. Indeed they do. Really when you look round, sir, the young people seem to be leading a very funny life since the war. It's these gratuities, I suppose. But then, that can't last for ever. There must be a settling down soon."

"Yes, Benson," Marling replied, his finger-tips still together. "And yet you can't blame them, I suppose. They've been through a bad time. Reaction, you know."

"Quite, sir," and Benson continued to stand, a bundle of papers in his hand—a thing that was part and parcel of Benson. He was never seen without papers in his hand. You met him in the corridor—there were always papers in his hand. Frequently, too, you saw him going to lunch to brood over another bundle of papers, although wrapped carefully around them then would be a copy of the day's *Times*. If summoned hurriedly to his employer, he invariably carried what he was doing with him. And as he talked he would slip off the red tape and then slip it on again. If his papers were ever rolled and contained in an elastic band, he would roll the band up and down nervously, which made a noise that often irritated Marling. Or if he carried nothing at all, he fidgeted with his pince-nez, putting them on; then taking them off; now cleaning them with a pocket handkerchief; then rattling the money in his pockets. And when asked a question suddenly, he would screw up his face and tilt back his head.

After a long silence, Marling said: "How many Boards am I on now, Benson?"

"Let me see, sir. . . ." Head tilted back; face screwed up.

"Then I'll tell you—five."

Head back to normal: "*Five*. That's right, sir."

Another silence.

"Know anything about 'Combines'?"

"You mean this new glass concern?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, from all accounts they seem to be doing very well. A great deal of movement in the shares lately. They prophesy a great future for this group."

"Yes, Benson. They do."

Then, suddenly: "They've asked me to join their Board."

"Is that so, sir?" A moment of thought, and then: "But do you think you've the time, sir?"

"That's it. Have I? I don't want to get too tied-up at my age. I want to take things easier if it's possible. Want to have all the free time I can now that my boy's home."

"Exactly, sir. It's been a long time."

"Yes."

"You've found him changed, sir, older—more a man of the world?"

"Oh—yes. They've all grown older, Benson." And still those finger-tips were touching; still he looked steadily before him.

"That's confidential, of course. About 'Combines,'" Marling said presently. "Blessed if I know why I told you."

"Of course, sir."

But then Marling often spoke to Benson of things that were on his mind, and spoke of them in the same way afterwards. He would sit, in the same manner, his finger-tips together and speak to Benson as if he were talking to himself. "Funny thing, you know. Funny thing. Can't make it out at all. Can you, Benson?" And, of course, Benson never could. But it was safe, this thinking aloud, as from experience, Marling knew that his clerk was trustworthy. By contact they knew each other's ways. And often, through having thought aloud in Benson's presence, he was able to turn to him afterwards for any details that

GOVT. GIRLS COLLEGE SRINAGAR

he might have forgotten—for Benson's memory was of amazing clarity.

"Well—we've got till Thursday to think over this house at Marlow?" Marling said presently.

"Yes, sir."

"And you approve—in theory?—You think it's a good investment?"

"Oh yes, sir—I do. Very suitable indeed."

"Thank you, Benson."

Benson, seeing his employer still apparently engrossed in the calendar that hung on the opposite wall—turned and walked to the door. The papers of *Johnson v. Graham* lay before Marling on his desk.

Marling rose from his chair as his clerk left, walked over to his bookcase and picked from it a copy of the Stock Exchange Official Intelligence. He looked through the C's until he found 'The Combined Glass Manufactures Limited.' He found that it was an amalgamation of many glass enterprises. Its chairman was Richard Mosenthal, and the directors, with the exception of Sir John Bickworth, were names that he did not know. The offices were in Dorchester House, Old Broad Street.

Everyone was talking of this Company. It was a move in the right direction, they said—this amalgamation. Mosenthal had himself added to the limelight of publicity by a strong article he had written on the subject of the absorption of men into industry and laying down the manner in which it could most efficiently be done. This had caused much comment and for many months the 'Mosenthal letter' had been referred to in the Press, and discussed whenever men met and talked earnestly of this country and its future. The limelight was turned, in consequence, to the business in which he was interested, which, by that time, through rumours of expansion and the certainty of their recapturing the world's markets—with consequent revolutionary effects on output and price—was in a flourishing condition on the Stock Markets. Rumours had spread daily, as was the habit of those times, and 'Combines' were on everybody's lips, if they had wanted to make money quickly—as most people had.

Marling was puzzled. 'Funny chap, Mosenthal,' he mused. 'How the dickens does he think I can help? Lawyers! What do they want with lawyers? They've got their own! Don't know Mosenthal particularly well, either.' He stood by the window looking into the street below; his frock-coat was unbuttoned, his hands in his trouser pockets. No doubt Greville was at the bottom of this; he and Mosenthal were close associates. Marling had rung up Henry Barlow that very morning and had mentioned it to him, but Henry had preferred to discuss it when they met. "Rather leave it now, Christopher, if you don't mind. Wants thinking over, you know. Sounds good, though."

The invitation had only arrived by the first post and he was to dine with Mosenthal the following night. All he knew of Mosenthal was superficial. A pleasant enough fellow; a Jew, of course. They belonged to the same club. They had met at various places—the opera; once at Henry Barlow's; at the Goldsmiths Company when he had attended one of their dinners. But he knew little of him else, for Marling needed time before his reserve could be broken so that he spoke openly with people. And Marling, in common with many of his type, had little time to spare for Jews—as a race. They had entered, too forcibly, into the affairs of his nation, usurping the power that had hitherto belonged to his own.

He turned and paced slowly up and down the long strip of Persian rug that lay in front of his desk, and which ran almost from window to door. He supposed that he should be honoured by this invitation. So far he had sat only on the Boards of small companies. The Combined Glass Manufactures Limited could in no way be called a small company. It was a live concern. It was spoken of everywhere. They were going to return this country once more as the home of glass manufacture. "They'll touch £10 before the year's out," was Greville's usual comment. And not bad that, for a £1 share that wasn't a year old. Besides, it would put him in touch with new things—new interests, an almost unchartered world—and Marling liked that. It certainly would give him, too, a standing in another way,

in that the world of big business was new to him, and he would be launched into it thoroughly by accepting this invitation. He felt at heart both flattered and pleased.

But as he had remarked to Greville a month previously, "My business is the law," when talking of this very company. He wondered whether it was worth while. He was getting on in years, though he had never owned to feeling old. He had a fine practice, and only his son to provide for. Hugh would, he hoped, be providing for himself by the time he died. And he didn't wish to become embroiled unnecessarily. Yet it was pleasant, deucedly pleasant, to be invited to join the Board of this new and flourishing concern, little though he could visualize his value there. It gave him confidence; it gave him a new outlook.

He paused in his walk and opened the bottom left-hand drawer of his desk, from which he drew out a box of cigars It wasn't his custom to smoke a cigar so early in the morning. His first was usually after lunch. But he felt like a cigar; this letter from Mosenthal had made him feel expansive. He picked one out carefully, rolling it between his fingers and listening intently. Then he put that one back and chose another. Having lighted it and exhaled the first puff, he took up his position again by the window.

Yes, Mosenthal's letter had made a difference. He had never been ambitious beyond his own particular sphere, but he liked this idea. And there was another thing to be thought of; this would be only the beginning; others might follow. If Hugh took up Company Law, it would be infernally useful to him, he being on the Board of large industrial undertakings. Besides, a bit of a name helped. Great if people would say in a few years, "That's old Marling's son." He couldn't get away from that. The thought appealed to him. Hugh would be pleased too—pleased apart from the work he might be able to send to him.

The telephone rang. It was Greville. "Everything's soaring, Marling. Oils especially. 'Combines' opened at five and seven-eighths. You'll see 'em at ten, Marling. Mark my words! I bought two thousand for a client this morning, and they went up three-sixteenths before I'd

crossed the floor. Big buying while I was doing it. Saw Mosenthal yesterday. Things are moving there like you never saw!"

"What part did you play in my being offered a seat on the Combine Board, Greville?" Marling asked.

"Me? Why, bless my soul, quite a lot, I expect."

"But why, Greville? I don't follow."

"Why? Well, what's wrong with you, anyway. You *look* the part, don't you! Look like the Bank of England to me, Marling! Always did."

"But, seriously . . .?"

"I *am*. Just the chap, Marling. Honest, sound, good connections, well connected, well known, well spoken, well dressed!" Then a chuckle came over the wires. "I could go on for hours like that if I wasn't so infernally busy!"

Marling regretted the lack of seriousness displayed by Greville over this all-important matter. He had hoped for —he knew not what. It was rather the feeling one has about discussing something for the sake of discussing it; because it gives one intense pleasure to do so. Rather as a man enjoys talking about the woman he loves to someone who will understand and who will not mind listening. But he had hoped that Greville would have talked about it in a business-like manner; pointing out this; pointing out that. Discussing production, potential markets and development. But perhaps that was difficult over the telephone. But he'd discuss it with him at the club that night. He wanted to get the intimate outsider's point of view before discussing it with Mosenthal the next day. It wouldn't do for him to be associated with this new company unless it *was* sound; unless it *had* possibilities. Marling was never associated with failures, anyway.

The telephone rang again. He reached for it.

"Ah, Hugh. Yes? Lunch to-day? Of course, my boy. Where? The Club? That'll suit me. Call here at twelve-forty-five. Very good. Yes. Quite all right. Yes, no appointment till three-thirty. Right, Hugh."

He replaced the receiver.

"Why don't you go out, Son? Don't stay in on my

account," Marling had said so often since Hugh had been home. But Hugh had replied, "I'd rather be with you, Dad." Splendid, that, splendid! And this property at Marlow. "It's nice of you, Dad, but I wouldn't let you do it," he had said, as they had sat together in his study last night. "I'm perfectly happy here, and it's an extravagance, anyway." Fancy the boy thinking of that! No, he was lucky to have Hugh. And look at young Harold! Henry had told Marling not a week ago that he'd had to pay his bills again. Cost him a few hundred pounds, too. A wretched youth, that. Namby-pamby. Useless. A waster, Harold. Never had cared for him. . . . Yes, he'd have another talk to Hugh at lunch about Marlow. And of course, there was this 'Combines' Directorship. Hugh would be delighted to hear about that. He could see him—"Dad, that's great!" He was so glad that the war had not robbed him of his enthusiasm. . . .

Hugh arrived at the appointed hour. A word for Benson; a word for Marling's secretary, Miss Taperly. Then they walked down the heavily pile-carpeted stairs to the street.

They walked to Marling's club and turning into St. James's Street, Hugh said: "There's something about London, Dad. I walked here this morning. It's so clean. Green, too. It makes me feel, more than any place I know, how good it is to be alive. Especially to-day."

"Yes, Hugh," Marling said, changing his stride to be in step with his son. "This time of year, too."

They walked up St. James's Street, Marling with his malacca cane in his right hand, gripped half-way so that it swung with his arm. Soldier-like, both of them; upright; tall; distinguished. Hugh in a lounge suit; Marling in his frock-coat, a buttonhole in his lapel.

"Yes, Hugh. I walk up this street every day. Have done for over thirty years. Look at that cart, there, by the way. That delivers hats. That firm's delivery vans have always been like that; the men dressed the same way. I remember those delivery vans when I was a boy, Hugh. Your grandfather always bought his hats there. Picturesque, isn't it?" And then, "I'm glad you feel that way

about London. Did I ever show you Pickering Place, by the way? At the lower end? No one seems to know it. One of the prettiest bits of London I know. Escaped the pickaxe, thank God. On the left-hand side going down, through an alley—into a courtyard." He stopped to point out where it lay. "I'll show you on the way back." Then they turned and entered the club.

Stevens, from his glass-topped cubicle, bowed respectfully. They washed their hands and entered the dining-room, pausing at the cold buffet.

"Good morning, sir. The cold beef is very good to-day. Not too overdone. The pigeon pie? And for you, too, sir? Very good."

They walked to a table by the window, next to the one Greville occupied most evenings. The midday sun beat down upon the pavement outside, reflecting with a whiteness that Marling found glaring.

"The blinds, Thompson! Pull them, please." And then to Hugh: "They make this place like an oven, my boy. Never pull those blinds till the room's like a bake-house. Always complaining of it. I'll have to speak to the secretary."

Half-way through lunch Hugh said:

"There's one thing you've never told me, Dad. That's your financial position. I mean, from appearances you're a man of means. But you're a professional man. You live on your earnings."

"Oh, I'm well enough off," Marling said, wondering if he should tell him then about the 'Combines' offer.

"That's all very well, Dad. That's comparative. Many a man with fifty thousand a year is hard up. It depends on the calls on his purse."

"I've not many of those, boy," Marling answered.

"There's me," Hugh said. "You give me £500 a year."

"Nothing. I'll have to increase it, too. Never thought of that, Hugh. You'll need more now."

Hugh sat with his elbows on the table, his face supported by his hands. "In a way," he said, slowly, "that isn't the point I'm raising. And yet it is."

"In debt?" Marling raised his eyebrows.

"Good Lord, no! But that's the only thing we've never discussed—your means."

"Does it matter?"

"Yes, I'm afraid it does."

Marling looked at his son. As handsome a young fellow as ever he'd seen, he thought. That's what Greville had said. Yet his face was not perfect. That small shrapnel wound on his right cheek, for example: that certainly showed. But it was manly, that scar. Marling never knew of it until the boy had arrived home, either. But his hair, the way he brushed it, from its parting on the left, across his head; it was thick and glossy, and straight. It fell naturally into position and was never seen to be out of place. His bronzed, open face. His crooked smile, as he looked at his father now. Mischievous, almost. It invited a smile in return. It did more; it demanded one. Marling found himself smiling too. And the boy looked happier to-day. A little quiet last night. Not quite himself.

"How?" he asked.

"Well, you see, take this car business, for example. You want to buy me a car. Well, for all I know, a Ford might break you. On the other hand, you might buy me a Rolls and think nothing of it. It's all comparative, Dad. You tell me to go and see about that car. You give me no idea as to how much I can spend."

"Well, of course, a Rolls-Royce *would* be out of the question." How he seemed to smile in return. And the boy's teeth. Remarkably good!

"Well, that's established, Dad, anyhow. You've not a Rolls-Royce income."

A pause.

"Well, I suppose I *could* afford one, boy. Don't think it's necessary, though. A bit overdone for a boy of your age. Bad form, eh?"

Another pause.

"Have you—er, saved at all, Dad?"

That question seemed awkward to ask. Hugh looked down as he asked it. Marling noticed the reticence, the apparent effort of asking.

"Oh yes, a bit, Hugh. Locked away, you know. Gilt-

edged stuff mostly. I'm taking a pretty big holding in 'Combines.' That's the only speculative stuff—if you can call it that. Greville says it's gilt-edged, though I can't include it in that category myself. Otherwise—Oh yes, you need have no worry, if that's what you're thinking, boy. You'll be all right. You'll be comfortably off. A thousand or two a year after I'm gone. Four, maybe."

Hugh looked up.

"I wasn't thinking of that, Dad. That's the last thing. I don't want that."

"But it will be yours. There's no one else."

"Well, that makes it easier, anyway," Hugh said, presently.

"What?"

"You're absolutely sure you want me to go to the Bar?" Hugh asked, suddenly. "I mean, you realize I shan't be earning a penny for years. I'll be dependent on you all that time?"

"Of course."

So that was what was on the boy's mind! He'd discussed this very point with Greville He'd often wondered about that. Hugh had always been independent-minded. He liked that about him. Honest—always wanting to stand on his own feet.

"Yes, I want you to go to the Bar," Marling was saying. "That's always been my ambition. If, of course, you feel you can't wait—that you want to be earning something meantime, I'm sure I could fix you up somewhere. But I'd rather you went into the Law. I'm behind you there, too," he added. "My practice is growing."

Hugh noticed his father looking past him, through the windows at his back. A far-away look that came often into his eyes.

"Yes, that's always been my ambition for you," he said again. "Ever since you were born." And still his eyes seemed riveted to the blackened bricks of the buildings across the road.

Hugh shifted his position. His elbows left the table, his hands no longer supported his face. Instead he fingered the pepper-pot idly.

"Dad," he said.

Marling's eyes returned to his son's.

"Yes, Hugh?"

The pepper-pot put down; hands together; fingers interlaced.

"You know the General's daughter—Barbara?"

"You've told me of her—yes. A remarkable young woman, from all accounts."

"I want to marry her, Dad."

Marling who had reached for his glass, found his hand shaking slightly. A sudden clamminess on his forehead.

"I see," he said and replaced the glass on the table.

Hugh watched him.

"It's *that*, Dad—you see."

"I see," was again all Marling said. But he thought 'Why had I no idea of this? Hugh? Why, a mere boy! Of course, the thing was absurd. Only just home, too. I've looked forward to this for so long.' And that hand of his still shaking. Only hoped Hugh didn't notice.

"You think I'm too young, Dad?"

"No, boy, no. Wasn't thinking of that. Come to think of it, you're as old as all the others who've come back. You're all of an age now."

"Then you approve—in theory?"

"In theory, Hugh? Well, I've always believed in marriage. Can't understand those who don't. The right woman, of course."

"She's that, Dad."

"And when do you want to marry?" he asked, when neither had spoken—each hoping that the other would break the silence.

"Well, Barbara will be over here in five weeks. . . ."

"Five weeks—eh? Pretty soon, that. Pretty hasty, don't you think. . .?"

"Of course, there's nothing arranged yet. That's what I want to discuss. But nothing we ever did would be hasty, Dad. We know each other too well."

"Yes—of course." Again that silence. Why couldn't he say something? Everything Marling said sounded lame; unreal. He couldn't say "But five weeks, Hugh! You've only been home three! Two months altogether!

That's little time—after four years." No, he couldn't say that. And the boy's face. So evidently in earnest now. The smile had gone. He was watching his father intently; his forehead puckered.

"Barbara's coming over with an aunt," Hugh was saying. "Just for a holiday, you know. That was the idea. Of course, this has altered things rather. I mean, when I left nothing had happened. I only knew myself last mail. I wrote to her just as I was sailing."

"You never spoke of it to her?"

"Well—no. Not exactly, Dad. We were just wonderful friends. The parting, you know. Leaving her—made me realize. It just happened then."

"And what does the General say?"

"He doesn't know."

"Doesn't know, Hugh! Do you mean to say you haven't spoken to him?"

"No opportunity, Dad. I'm writing, of course, to-day. That is, if you approve."

"But, Hugh, that's very unusual."

"How? What could I do? I didn't ask her myself till the boat was just sailing."

"But you could have written to the General—surely?"

"And said what? Besides, Barbara mightn't have accepted me."

That crooked smile again. Attractive, deucedly attractive, Marling thought.

"Well, I suppose you know best, Son," was what he said. 'Have to write to the General myself,' he thought. Hugh being married! Why hadn't he thought of that?

"I don't want you to think I'm just rushing into this thing—madly. Barbara and I understand each other. Our love is based on the right stuff. If you think we ought to wait—we'll wait. If you think for financial reasons we ought to wait till I'm making an income at the Bar—then we'll wait again. Unfortunately, Dad, I'm in your hands."

"Unfortunately?"

"Well, it comes to that. You keep me now. If I marry you'll be keeping both of us. That's looking at the position squarely."

It was like Hugh, that. No nonsense about Hugh. He would never become sentimental over a thing like this. Yes, Marling was glad the boy had raised the subject in this way. Many boys would have slurred over that part. It was true, of course. No getting away from that; the boy was right. He would be keeping them—for some years, too. But hadn't Hugh earned that? Hadn't he given up four valuable years for soldiering? And at a time most needed too?

"You needn't worry on that score, Hugh. That will be my pleasure," he said.

Pleasure! Funny, that. Yet he supposed it would be. After all, Hugh was his son. His happiness, you know. . . .

"You're wonderful, Dad," Hugh said. "And yet I'm not happy about it."

"The money, you mean? Nonsense, boy."

"I mean it, Dad. I would have discussed it with you first if I'd had the opportunity. It never occurred to me —then—that I would be earning nothing. Out there I was. It's only the last few weeks of idling that have made me realize. It makes me feel infernally small."

"Nonsense, boy. Nonsense!"

Yes, he'd better write to the General to-day—this afternoon. The girl here in five weeks. A daughter-in-law! Somehow he'd never thought of that. Of course they'd be living in London. They'd be near, maybe. They would meet often. But it wouldn't be the same. Barbara? A pretty name, that.

"What is she like, Hugh? Tell me about her."

Hugh began. He told him from the beginning. Marling watched and saw the slight flush increasing the tan on his cheeks.

"Extravagant, eh?"

"No. Not a bit. But out there, you know, things happen so much more easily. Polo, for example. Lots of men play on their pay. Not good ponies, of course, but they can play, all the same. Servants, too. It's rather a luxurious life. Especially for a woman. They have a wonderful time out there. To come back to a drab life over here kills most of them."

"I've seen them, Hugh, in the Cromwell Road Boarding Houses."

"That's it, Dad. I couldn't ask Barbara to do that. Besides, the General, you know. . . ."

"Obviously."

Have to do them well, Marling thought. But five weeks. . . .

"I think a great deal depends on what the General says," Marling said, presently. "How old is—er—Barbara?"

"A year younger than me."

A silence again. Confound these silences! They didn't happen before.

"And young Fortescue—what does he say?" Marling asked.

"Oh, Gerald?" A sudden pause; a frown. "Of course, we were always together. 'The Three Musketeers' they used to call us. It was Mrs. Brocklehurst's name for us—and it stuck. Of course, Gerald and she are pretty good friends."

"I'm glad he approves. A nice young fellow, that."

Hugh looked at his father quickly.

"Well, my boy," and Marling looked at his watch. "Let's go into the Smoking-room."

Hugh followed him. How erect his father; how wonderfully preserved for a man of his years. And how good, too. It had been unpleasant, that talk. Yet how easy his father had made it. "It will be my pleasure," he had said. No questions, either. He just accepted it, and accepted it warmly. And when he had told him about Barbara—of how she handled a horse. "Good for her, Hugh! Good for her!" And Gerald—"I'm glad he approves." . . .

And Marling, paying his bill, was thinking—Have I behaved properly? Did I carry it off? Why hadn't I thought of this before. . . .

They sat together in the Smoking-room. Hugh showed his father the watch that Barbara had sent him. "Can't understand these newfangled things. They're bound to go wrong. A Half-hunter's good enough for me. Had this watch nearly twenty years. I suppose these flat affairs are

all right. Prefer the good old-fashioned honest sort better."

Like a couple of schoolboys comparing their first watches. But it was necessary to talk about something.

Presently Hugh said:

"I'm glad you approve, Dad—about Barbara."

"Of course, boy. Of course."

"I've always thought that if I married, I'd marry young. You see, I'm fond of children, Dad. I think to enjoy them, they must grow up with you."

Slowly: "Yes, Hugh."

Then, having finished their coffee, they collected their hats and walked out of the club.

"Which way are you going?" Marling asked.

"I'd thought of getting a game of 'squash.' It's infernally hot, but I must have exercise."

Marling looked at his son; upright; healthy; happy. "Yes, that's right, boy. Keep fit. We'll have a talk to-night. Henry and Margaret are dining, but after they've gone. Lot to discuss. Financial things, too." He patted Hugh on the back. "We'll talk then."

They smiled. Another pat for Hugh's shoulder. Then Hugh walked north to the Bath Club, and Marling south to his office.

Somehow the spring in Marling's walk seemed to have gone. He walked slowly. His head not so erect as usual; the malacca cane carried by its gold knob, as if supporting him in his walk. Hugh married! No, he had never included that in his calculations. Not for many years to come. And Hugh? What was that he had said? Marrying young—having your children grow up with you? Yes, that was true enough. He supposed that Hugh hadn't realized that that had not happened for him. Marling was over forty when Hugh was born. And yet *had* they missed so much? . . . Yes, he supposed they had. Of course, this war, you know. Four years. Four of the best years, too. . . .

He turned into King Street. And he had not shown Hugh Pickering Place. Pity, that. Another time. He hadn't mentioned 'Combines' either. Doing it for Hugh, too—

if it came to that. . . . He mounted the stairs to his office, hung his top-hat on the peg and returned to his desk. The papers of *Johnson v. Graham* lay before him. He picked them up, held them for a moment, then put them down. His mind did not seem receptive; it was overwhelmed by this news. And the boy, so obviously happy. . . .

He rose again from his chair and walked to the window, standing there with frock-coat unbuttoned, his hands in his pockets. The July sunshine poured in at an angle through the windows, concentrating on his desk. . . . Yes, he had not expected this—so soon. He had never expected it at all, if it came to that. It was one of those things that men do not think about. In the war, men said it was never they themselves who would be hit; it was always the other man.

Benson entered.

"Mr. Scrivener 'phoned, sir. I told him a letter was in the post to him."

Hands still in his pockets; still looking out of the window:

"Thank you, Benson. You told him we were taking counsel's opinion?"

"I did, sir."

"Send Miss Taperly in, will you?"

The door closed.

Of course, there were many things to discuss now. Everything seemed to have altered. This house at Marlow. Might do for Hugh, of course. Better talk of that to-night, after Henry and Margaret had gone. . . . 'Growing up with your children' . . .

Marling turned as Miss Taperly entered, and returned slowly to his desk. He moved the papers of *Johnson v. Graham* from his blotting-pad, holding them again as if weighing them in the balance. No, he seemed to have little interest in the case to-day.

"Mr. Graham is calling at three-thirty," he said presently. "Will you ask Mr. Buxton to see him? He knows the case. Is Mr. Buxton in?"

"Not yet, Mr. Marling."

"Well, hand him these, please, and ask him if he will

mind seeing him. Ask Mr. Buxton to convey my apologies to Mr. Graham. I have an unexpected appointment elsewhere."

Miss Taperly took the papers and sat silently, notebook in hand. Marling lay back thoughtfully in his chair, his finger-tips together, touching and untouching, his eyes searching the calendar on the opposite wall. His dictation began, but it came jerkily. It lacked that slow reasoned fluency. But he talked on, Miss Taperly unconsciously sucking the end of her pencil in the moments of silence.

And presently he said:

"That will do, Miss Taperly. Have those on my desk when I return, please."

Then he rose, walked to the hat-stand and reached for his hat. He drew his malacca cane from the lower portions and slowly put on his gloves.

"What time will you be back?"

"Oh—about an hour, Miss Taperly."

Then he walked out of the door that his typist held open for him, and down the stairs to the street.

Yes, it was stuffy inside. Out here in the sunshine things assumed proper proportions. In St. James's Street, again. Along Piccadilly. He didn't mind where. The Park? Yes, a bit of green there. Pleasant to sit and watch. Near the Round Pond perhaps. See the children sailing their boats. Jolly, that. The children, too. Yes, he'd make for there. Never done this sort of thing before; never left his work. But to-day was different. Things like this didn't happen every day. He couldn't think in the office, either. So many interruptions. The telephone—wretched invention. No privacy nowadays. Things getting worse, too, as the years went on. "The war sharpened our wits. It made us find ways." That's what Greville had said. Yes, the war had been responsible for many things. By the Berkeley Hotel he ran into Lawson. "I hear the boy's back, Marling. Glad to hear it. My daughter says he's causing a bit of a flutter among the Debs this season."

A hearty laugh, Lawson's.

"Ah, Lawson! He's developed, you know. They all have."

"I expect you're pleased to have him back, what?"

"Yes. Yes. It's good to see him." A friendly handshake and he was passing Devonshire House.

"I hear your boy's back," seemed on everyone's lips. And soon he'd be saying "He's engaged, too. Marrying a charming girl." Yes, she must be charming if Hugh had chosen her. Barbara? Five weeks. He'd be seeing her then. His heart seemed to beat faster under his fawn waistcoat. A bit of an experience, meeting a daughter-in-law! He'd have to be careful about that. He'd have to give her a real welcome, too. Have to make her think he was glad. . . . He turned into the Park. He wished above all else that he had thought of this before. He might have adjusted things then. And Hugh was playing 'squash' now; keeping himself fit. It was like the boy, that; he did everything thoroughly. Not many boys would play 'squash' on a sweltering day like this. But Hugh did. He'd be thorough in everything, as he was over his health. He was sound in all ways. His head never ran away with him.

The Park seemed deserted. Cars passed slowly, raising small clouds of dust behind them. A few people sat on the shady side, talking idly to their companions. Marling walked on, oblivious to them all. He reached the Round Pond some fifteen minutes later. Nursemaids with prams walked slowly round. Small craft sailed on the water. One, as if caught in the Doldrums, was lying inert in the centre. A park-keeper was discussing means of its recovery with a patient nursemaid, whose charge tugged at her skirt and cried for it intermittently. On the grass around, some played cricket; others merely sat; some slept. A haze above everything; a silence; a sense of restfulness.

"A lovely day, sir," the park-keeper said, in passing.

"It is."

Marling sat, his top-hat tilted over his forehead, screening his eyes, his malacca cane between his knees, both hands resting on its gold knob. He watched the children with a curious smile; a far-away look in his eyes that Hugh had noticed so often. As if he were looking through all that he saw, creating there a world of his own thoughts. The

children. . . . He'd be watching his own grandchildren soon. . . .

"Funny jobs we get here," the park-keeper said, returning. "It's either children who've lost their mothers, or mothers their children. Yesterday I had to pull a kid out of the water. Now I've got to get that boat back."

"Yes. Yes. I suppose so."

"But it's good to see them, ain't it, sir?"

"It is. It is."

"Just the place for them, here."

"It is. Just the place."

Marling rose then and walked slowly back. He pulled out his watch. Four-thirty. He had sat there long enough. It was hot there, too—on the back of his neck. He walked out of the Park almost opposite to his own house. There he hailed a taxi. He was glad that he had sat there. He had been able to think more clearly. And he was returning now with a more settled outlook. The children, of course. . . . A grandson. . . . Yes, there was some recompense.

He climbed once more the stairs to his office, returning his belongings to their respective positions. On his blotting-pad were many letters. He pushed them aside and sat down at his desk. Slowly he reached for a sheet of paper from the rack in front of him. Then he picked up his pen.

"*My Dear General Brocklehurst,*"—[he wrote]

"*My son has to-day told me of his attachment for your daughter. He assures me that he has had no opportunity of discussing this matter with you, but his letter will reach you at the same time as my own.*

"*Of my son you have had opportunities to judge, and I would add nothing that would influence you in your judgment. Of his family and his prospects, however, I feel it my duty to write. He has, as you may know, a small allowance from me, which will, of course, be considerably increased if you approve of this engagement. He is anxious, as I am for him, to go to the Bar, where I think he will do well.*

"*For my part, as a lawyer with a fairly large practice, I am in a position to help him considerably. There is no need,*

therefore, for you to have anxieties as to the boy's future. It will be my pleasure to give them a suitable start in life, free from all financial embarrassments.

"He is, in addition, my only son, and will inherit what money I have to leave. To be frank, as I consider it my duty to be on this occasion, the boy should have nearly five thousand pounds a year on my death.

"Of myself, I am a widower. I am senior partner in this firm, as you will see from the letter-heading. There is little else I can tell you, as my life has been far from distinguished, but I believe we have mutual friends, one being a distant cousin —Henry Barlow.

"Of my own feelings on receiving this news, I can only assure you, sir, that I am deeply moved. My son is all that I have left. But it is a great joy to me to know that he has chosen your daughter. I have not yet had the great pleasure of meeting you, but your name is known to me; your gallant deeds are spoken of still. It will be of infinite pleasure to me, therefore, to welcome a daughter of yours into my home circle and I look forward most keenly to making her acquaintance when she arrives, so I am told by my son, in five weeks' time.

"There is one matter on which I have thought considerably. Your feelings as a father may guide you to think as I did. You will, no doubt, wish them, on account of their youth, to wait until they are a little older. That was my own feeling. But on consideration, I feel that we, who are now getting on in years, should give to youth all that is in our power. Your daughter and my son are well known to each other; the usual time devoted to making sure that they are suitably matched does not apply in this case. The youth of this country, too, is grown older. It knows its mind with the assurance of Experience. To have children when parents are still young, is one of life's greatest joys. In many cases it is financial reasons that deter them. In the case of these two young people, that complication does not arise. For my own part, therefore, an early marriage would have my warmest approval.

"I have often wanted to write to you, to thank you for your kindnesses to my son. He speaks of you with the greatest enthusiasm and praise. This letter will, I hope, convey my thanks to you."

Then reading it through again, he picked up his pen once more and dipped it into the ink. Slowly he signed 'Christopher Marling' in his large spidery writing. Then he closed the letter and sealed it, holding it as he had the papers of *Johnson v. Graham*, as if weighing it in the balance. Then he put it carefully into the small mahogany tray on his desk labelled 'OUT.'

Benson entered.

"Mr. Mosenthal rang, sir, while you were out. He says can you find it convenient to call on him at his offices at six to-night?"

Marling rose slowly from his desk.

"Combines?" Benson heard him say—as if to himself—as he stood by the window, his hands in his trouser pockets. "Yes, there's still 'Combines,' I suppose."

Benson waited patiently. Presently he said:

"Will that be convenient, sir?"

A pause. Then:

"Yes, Benson, that will be convenient."

And Benson, before closing the door, noticed that his employer was still standing there, gazing vacantly into the street below.

CHAPTER IV

RICHARD MOSENTHAL lived in Lancaster Gate. Beginning life in a suburb of Manchester, he had risen after the war from comparative obscurity to be a financier of no mean importance. From being a member of a provincial firm of stockbrokers, he had come to London in the spring of 1909 and had entered the firm of Halliday and Brooks. His talents were soon recognized there, and since his commission account was assuming gigantic proportions, he was offered a partnership. And from that moment things moved for Richard Mosenthal.

The firm of Halliday and Brooks prospered from that moment, too. Yet Mosenthal was never satisfied. Money he was making, and in plenty, but the power that could

be obtained only through independence, was not yet his. He therefore founded a Trust Company. The Watling Investment Trust was founded in 1912 and their first issue was over-subscribed many times. Other issues followed quickly and equally successfully, and soon this Trust Company was being regarded as one of the most successful in the City of London. People followed him; he was spoken of everywhere. By the time the war had broken out, it was rumoured that he was worth a million pounds sterling.

The war gave him further opportunities. He financed or became financially interested in factories. Preferably those manufacturing munitions or other products that could quickly be turned into gold at that time. Things were needed urgently then; big contracts were given out—and usually loosely. Mosenthal seemed behind those concerns —if the contracts were worth having. Otherwise other people were—and they lost money. His shrewdness was more than was common to his race. People said he had a flair. He had more than that.

By the time the war had ended, his holdings were vast. His power was immense. The Watling Investment Trust was beyond question the most secure and powerful of its kind. If Mosenthal was behind a thing—it was sound. Stockbrokers hung around his offices for the crumbs in the form of Underwriting. Everyone interested in finance was pleased to know him. Richard Mosenthal was a power in their midst.

But he was not likeable. Men respected his judgment —his uncanny cleverness. He had never been known to let people down. That was something strongly in his favour. Yet one's feelings on meeting him were distinctly unfavourable. He looked shifty. It was a thing that one quickly overcame on further acquaintance. It came about chiefly through the quietness of his voice; it was soft, sibilant. When speaking he appeared to be whispering. He seemed to be whispering secrets into his listener's ear. And when people do that, their conversation is naturally assumed to be of a strictly private nature; as if they were ashamed of what they had to say. Or, that it could not

be broadcast to the assembly. And then the rest of the onlookers would feel out of that secret—just onlookers. And people do not like being placed in that position. Besides, he seldom allowed people near to him; he addressed them always with the prefix 'Mister.' He seemed unable to drop that. That added to the dislike for him. He was unfriendly, they thought; conceited, too, as his conversation was always in the first person singular. His companies were always '*my*' companies.

In appearance he was unattractive, too. He was short, swarthy. His head was bald, but the fringe at the back and over each ear was still reminiscent of the curly, greasy hair that had once grown there. He wore his clothes badly. His waistcoat was always wrinkled over the curve of his stomach as it protruded over the top of his trousers. And usually those wrinkles were filled with cigar ash, or the dust that had remained. His coats were ill-fitting through the sloping of his shoulders which tended to throw his coat away from his neck. His hat was always many sizes too small. He was, in effect, an untidy, unpleasant person to look upon.

Yet he had infinite charm. That had been half his success. When he talked, he talked to that person alone. That intimate manner of speech had flattered. When people had asked the best investment of the moment, he had whispered his reply. That, in itself, had given confidence. It seemed to say 'I want only you to know.' His smile was another asset. Faces that are intensely ugly light up in a peculiar manner when they smile. It may be, perhaps, the strange contrast. But it was more than that with Richard Mosenthal. His face changed; his brown eyes lighted up and sparkled in their merriment. They twinkled as his excitement grew.

He was extremely excitable. He talked with his hands and his whole body. When explaining a point he used every limb and muscle. When telling a story, he moved and acted every part. He was magnetism and personality itself.

He was musical. A Bechstein grand piano stood in the corner of his drawing-room. There he played. He played

in the same way, whether he was alone or whether he was entertaining—as he did on a lavish scale. Women came gladly to his house. Always some person of the moment sang or played there, too. His parties were matters of import during the London Season. He attended the Opera regularly and knew the singers intimately. They came afterwards and sang to his guests. He was regarded as a power, too, in the artistic world of London of that time. His pictures were the envy of many collectors. He bought extravagantly, but with a real knowledge. And he would show them off to his guests, gesticulating, the large diamond ring on the small finger of his right hand flashing in the lights from the hanging candelabra above, or from the lustres in his hall and staircase landings.

His walk was feline. In cloth-topped boots his small feet seemed to cover the ground quickly; silently. He had a mincing walk. And always his right hand was swaying in front of him—as though he carried in it some small parcel; a parcel so small that it weighed but little, yet had to be carried with infinite care. And the way he always gripped the arm of those with whom he conversed. One saw him always conversing in that manner; his mouth close to the ear of his listeners; his hand gripping their arm. As his enthusiasm grew, so did he lapse into broken English. It became uncontrolled. His accent was slightly guttural. He had never been able to overcome this failing. It had inconvenienced him considerably during the war. Scotland Yard had watched him carefully at first; they had descended upon him on two occasions, following complaints from his neighbours in Lancaster Gate. A light had been seen burning from the top back room of his house. It coincided with the visits of Zeppelins at that time. There must, therefore, be some connection. Yet Scotland Yard had known better as time went on. Richard Mosenthal was friendly with many members of the Cabinet. His advice had often been asked during those critical times. He was, in effect, a mystery to many.

Being unmarried added to that mystery. He was seldom seen in company with others save when he entertained. A closed car called for him each morning. This he was seen to

enter and immediately become absorbed in the papers he drew from the brown leather portfolio which had become a familiar adjunct. In the same way he returned in that car each evening, still reading, and as the car drew up he put those papers back into the brown portfolio. But he never opened his own front door; it always seemed to open as if by magic. And it closed silently after him—the face of Mitchell, his butler, bowing gravely to the chauffeur before closing the door.

It was thought by many that he affected this air of mystery. It became him. It becomes any man who figures, or wishes to figure, as a power behind the scenes. People pointed him out. "There's Mosenthal! They say he is behind this new combine." They always *said* he was, whether true or not; whether they knew or not. That was because he was behind so many things. He bought up theatres; he became interested in groups of cinemas. Yet his name seldom appeared. The information just leaked out with time. "Mosenthal's behind that" became a familiar saying in 1919.

And the Watling Investment Trust had floated the issue of the Combined Glass Manufactures Limited. It had been a phenomenal success. By early August the shares were standing at over £7. It was the highest that they had yet been. And on the evening of Saturday, August 9, 1919, Mosenthal had decided to ask certain of his directors to dine.

The first to arrive was Holbrook. Thomas Holbrook had spent his life in the manufacture of glass. He was senior partner in Holbrook, Fairfield & Co., one of the companies which had been absorbed by this new flotation. His knowledge of the glass industry was beyond question. His was an old-established business, handed down from generation to generation. In buying up Holbrook, Fairfield & Co. for the group, Mosenthal had considered himself lucky. They were well respected in the trade. Others might more readily fall in with his scheme if he had their backing. And this had proved the case. Companies that had at first been unapproachable were more readily convinced when given the lead by this old and conservative

firm. And they were more than ever convinced when Thomas Holbrook appeared as one of the directing spirits behind this new combine.

"Ah, Mr. Holbrook!" Mosenthal said, as he walked from the marble mantelpiece against which he had been leaning and greeted him. "I asked you to come early. Good! You would like a glass of sherry. Yes?"

He led Holbrook by the arm to a table at the far end of his L-shaped drawing-room, as if he cared not whether he would, or would not, like a glass of sherry; he was to have it.

"I find the glass of sherry with one's soup quite insufficient. One glass—No. Two—Yes. Three perhaps. It makes for conversation. And conversation, Mr. Holbrook. . . ."

"Thank you," said Holbrook.

"And a cigarette. Yes? Turkish or American? American. Ah, here it is."

A lighted match awaited him.

"Thank you."

Having filled Holbrook's glass, Mosenthal led him back to the marble mantelpiece.

"And the news, Mr. Holbrook. How are things to-day?"

"They're improving."

"Good. Good. And the new plant?"

"It will be all right, I think."

"Think!" Mosenthal shrugged his shoulders playfully. "That is a word! You *think*!"

"It has been a big expense," Holbrook said, his back to the marble mantelpiece.

Mosenthal snapped his fingers airily. "Expense! What is that? Who can progress without the big risk? That is the first thing. To have the vision. To see." He took Holbrook's empty glass and walked with it mincingly to the far end of the L-shaped room. "Perhaps another?"

"No, thank you."

"Ah, then my sherry is not good?"

"It is excellent, Mr. Mosenthal."

"And you will not—change your mind?"

"No, thank you."

Mosenthal put the wine-glass back on the silver tray.

"*Think!*" he repeated, returning, his head on one side, his brown eyes smiling. "And you talk always of the expense! That is not the way, Mr. Holbrook, to achieve the big thing. It is first to see, and when I see clearly, then I *know*. And you, too, must see as I see. That is the essential."

Holbrook looked down into that brown and furrowed face which seemed to be smiling mischievously into his. He shifted his weight on to his other leg and looked for a moment at his patent leather shoes.

"You've always been a confirmed optimist, Mr. Mosenthal," he said, still looking at his shoes.

"Optimism! But what is life without that? Without it I am as nothing because I do not belong to such things unless I know they are right. You, Mr. Holbrook, are the only technical member of my board. That you and I see eye to eye together—that is essential. That you will agree. When you, as my technical adviser, say that I am right, then the others—they agree also. You will not change your mind? Another glass of the sherry?"

"No, thank you."

Mosenthal fingered an ornament on the shelf.

"It is funny," he said, "your mind. There are the others—I talk and they listen and always I take them this way and that way. Always they move with me, seeing the things that I see. But you? No. You see only the things that *you* see. Your mind, it is made up always beforehand. It is a bad fault," he added, still fingering that ornament.

"If it's the sherry," Holbrook said, smilingly, "that's my infernal liver!"

"Liver! What is that? You talk of your liver before it is come. You *make* the liver in your imagination. With me, I drink the sherry, but I have not the liver. That is because I do not consider such things. They do not exist for me. That is the faith that I have!" He snapped his chubby fingers and walked again to the far end of the room.

"That is the faith that must be yours, too, Mr. Holbrook," he added.

"I think we agree on broad lines," Holbrook said. "It's only that I consider we're moving too fast."

Mosenthal was adjusting the long and heavily interlined curtains of his windows.

"But we can never move too fast. To-day is not the time for waiting, Mr. Holbrook. We must build to-day, and build quickly. Otherwise we are left behind."

Holbrook ran his fingers through his thinning hair. "I think we're building too fast, anyway," he said. "We've already converted three of our companies to machinery. Personally, I think we should have waited. . . ."

"Waited!" Mosenthal turned quickly. '*Waited!* Would my shares be standing at over £7 to-day if I had waited? Would your own company be modernized to-day with the result that it is producing treble its output—if I had waited? No, my friend. That you know. Take the profit of your own undertaking—it has increased, has it not? Increased beyond your own estimates of such profit? And did not I tell you that it would increase by that much? Answer me, my friend—is that not so?"

Holbrook shifted his weight again on to his other leg.

"Yes," he said, "that's true."

"I was right—then? Ah, that is better! And if you take the other things I have said—were they not right also? Our first conversations, Mr. Holbrook. We discussed this Combine. Impossible, you say. The companies would never consider such a scheme. But I laugh at you. They will all come, I say. And with the exception of the few who have not the imagination—did they not *all* come in? And are they not glad that they came in? Who, I ask you, are the big buyers of our shares to-day? Is it not the companies themselves? Not only do they come in, my friend, but they buy also the shares. And their customers, too! That is faith, eh? That is enthusiasm that they have for my plan!" He turned to pick up some rose leaves that had fallen from the bowl on the piano. "Waiting!" he said. "It is but a word invented for fools!"

Holbrook remained silent for a moment, his upright figure still leaning against the mantelshelf.

"Well, we shall see," he said, presently. "Time will show."

"But we do not wait for that, Mr. Holbrook," Mosenthal said, dropping the rose leaves into the waste-paper basket. "Already I have the plans."

"For what?"

Mosenthal turned:

"For converting two more of the companies," he said.

"Two more! Which?"

"Sandemans and Hopkins Blount. They are the next on my plan. Already I have seen to it. The men from Hendersons came to me last week. I have given them the order."

"*Given it!* But . . ."

"Ah, Mr. Holbrook," Mosenthal said, returning to adjust the roses in the bowl, "the order, it cannot be given without the authority of the Board. That is what you have come to discuss. But," with a shrug of his shoulders, "I have told them that the order is coming. They are preparing now."

"For when?" Holbrook snapped.

"It will be installed by February," Mosenthal answered, his back to Holbrook, as he bent over the rose-bowl.

"But, Mr. Mosenthal, this is suicide. . . ."

Mosenthal turned:

"Suicide? That is a bad word. I do not like that word."

"But it *is* suicidal," Holbrook said warmly. "Really, Mr. Mosenthal, there are times when I really think you overstep the mark."

"Those words," Mosenthal answered, "I think you have used them to me before—this overstepping of the mark. You have, I think? Yes? But I did not overstep then, did I? Nor do I not overstep now, my friend. That is a thing that I never do." With another shrug of his shoulders he returned again to the rose-bowl. "And *why*, my friend, do I overstep now?" he asked.

"We've converted three factories to machinery at terrific cost, already."

"Terrific?"

"Machinery has never cost us more."

"That applies to all things—even glass."

Holbrook bit a finger-nail.

"I cannot agree to it," he said, "it is unnecessary—quite unnecessary."

Mosenthal gave a final touch to the roses in his bowl, looked at them for a moment with his head on one side, and then left them.

"Now, my friend!" he said, "it is unnecessary, you say. That is interesting!"

"There is still a big demand for lung-blown glass," Holbrook said heatedly. "All our companies are making headway. This gigantic expense can wait. There is no necessity for changing over to machinery at this stage. We can see how these three companies are working first. If they pay better—then we should consider whether it is not advisable to modernize Sandemans and Hopkins Blount. Not before. Not at this stage, anyhow. It's quite absurd."

Mosenthal walked over to Holbrook by the marble mantelpiece and playfully took hold of the lapel of his coat.

"Your mind—always it is made up beforehand, eh? That is the pity. That is why I think sometimes that you are not the big man of business that I imagined when I ask you to come on my Board. You do not see as I see. It is the courage that you need, Mr. Holbrook—the vision and the courage. I speak to-day with the vision and the courage that I had when I came first to this big city ten years ago. Without those two things I remain in Manchester always and no one knows Richard Mosenthal. Instead, I come, and all the big things that I touch—they prosper. But you think always of the expense, Mr. Holbrook, because that is the thing always nearest to your nose. But beyond your nose there are the world's markets. And to capture those—what then is expense? The hundred thousand pounds that it cost now to convert one factory—what is that? It is a mere nothing. In one year—in two—three, perhaps, it is forgotten because the profits they increase and increase. But you think always of expense—of waiting—of overstepping the mark. You do not think of the big future."

"But there are many obstacles in the way, Mr. Mosenthal. You speak as if it were too easy. That all we had to do was to manufacture and manufacture. Before launching out in this way there are a thousand things to be considered. One can't just rush into a thing like this. It's too big a proposition."

Mosenthal saw that a picture on the opposite wall was hanging slantwise. It was hardly noticeable, that slant, yet he had detected it. He walked over and adjusted it.

"You speak of obstacles," he said. "An obstacle, it is something in your path, is it not? But what is in your path? You, my friend, see always the things that block your way. That is the wrong thing to see. For me, I see always what is on the other side."

Holbrook bit his finger-nail again; his forehead wrinkled.

"I see no justification," he said, "for this further expansion. None whatever."

Mosenthal turned.

"Ah, my friend," he said, turning to give one final glance to the angle of the picture. "Again I say we do not see eye to eye. For me, it is all as clear as the daylight. Let us consider, my friend! Let us not condemn too hastily, because the things that we condemn to-day may mean the future of our big undertaking. Of the people who I have with me on my Board there is but one person for whom I have the respect—the respect of his judgment. That man, Mr. Holbrook, is yourself. You have the knowledge of the glass business, the knowledge that has been handed down from your father and your grandfather before him. You are of the glass business; I am of finance. Combine the knowledge of both and we have the success. But you see always as the controller of the small undertaking. I see always as the controller of the vast concern—the big combine. You see the picture of England and the products it can consume. I see the picture of the world and the new markets I can make. That is the difference between you and I, Mr. Holbrook. That is the big difference that I wish to make smaller."

"But Mr. Mosenthal, you must agree. . . ."

"I agree nothing, Mr. Holbrook," Mosenthal replied, returning again to the mantelpiece, "that interferes with my plan. We stand to-day on the threshold of big things. Those things have never been bigger, my friend. This glass business—it was founded in your country—in my country. England, in years gone by, was the home of the glass industry. But by the time the war came it had degenerated. France, America, Japan, Belgium—they had entered into this market. They had the cheaper labour and presently the better machinery. So they produce more economically, and presently they take this market from us. They leave us in the position where we can no longer control. We can only hold our own. Then the war comes. It makes this trade impossible for us. The potash, where can we get it but from Germany? The sand from Fontainebleau—is not France too busy to send it? So we are left, as you say, high and dry. The Government, they control this industry, therefore. The glass, during those times, must be produced only for the materials of war. And the people of this country they use the carton for their domestic purposes then. Their cream, it is served always in the carton wrapper. Of new glass—there is none. And the war ends. There is the dearth of glass that four years has created. The people of this country, they cry out now for glass. But there is none of it."

"Those things, Mr. Mosenthal," Holbrook said, "are obvious. I agree with them."

"Facts! Yes, they are facts. But there are other facts, too. The vast factories of the Northern France—at Charleroi—where are they to-day? Men have fought battles over them, I tell you. They are demolished. And the factories of Belgium? What are they when the Germans have left them? And America? Are they not too busy on other things? So the market to-day—it is open for the first country who will start the big campaign. For the country with the vision and the vision to act quickly—there is the world at its feet. That I see. But to compete, Mr. Holbrook, one must be properly equipped. It is of no use having the methods of our grandfathers. We must compete with the most modern weapons in our hands. To

fight this big battle with the standards of our forefathers—the human factor—it is of no use. America—it built up its reputation on machinery. Mass production, that is the thing of to-day. To rely on the power of man—the lung-blown glass only—it is absurd. To equip our factories quickly with the most modern machinery, that is the answer to our problem. We will regain then our past command ing position. . . ."

"I agree, Mr. Mosenthal. But let us wait until . . ."

"There is no waiting, Mr. Holbrook," he said. "What has our Prime Minister said? A land 'fit for the hero.' The foreign competitor, no more will he return to this country. The Government, they will build up the big tariff. They will protect our industry while the world is crying out for our finished products! Was ever a moment so opportune for the big campaign? No, my friend, we cannot wait—to-day. We must seize the opportunity—or it will pass us by. But your cigarette? Allow me?"

"Not another—thank you."

Mosenthal walked again to the other end of the L-shaped drawing-room. His chubby fingers were linked together as he walked, and his head thrown back. Backwards and forwards he walked.

"I think, my friend—and I think. Always I think for the prosperity of my company. I see and I see. I read and I learn. I dream too—the big visions. I know from my secret sources the condition of the world's markets. When I form this Combine I say I will return this industry to its original condition of prosperity. That is my thought, night and day. To hold back—to 'wait and see'—well, that is the thought of the coward—of the man who cannot command. And I have always commanded since I came to this big city. The undertakings I have controlled—they go from success to success. And of all the undertakings of which I am most proud, there is the Combined Glass Manufactures, which is my hobby—my pet. I watch the shares rise till to-day they stand at over £7. I see them standing at £10! £20! There is no knowing to what heights they will rise. That is because the markets for us are unlimited. But to win them we must grasp the oppor-

tunity that the war has given to us. If we let it go, my friend, then others will grasp it and reap the harvest which will be theirs." He paused by his desk and picked up a book that lay there, turning the leaves casually. "That is the position that I see," he said. "That is the position that you, too, must see. We must not at this stage talk of the expense. It is like the General who counts up his casualties before going into the battle. The good General thinks only of his objective. To gain that objective a company, a battalion, a brigade—what is it, if the objective is of sufficient importance? When I say I shall turn the companies we have absorbed into the most up-to-date factories in the world at *whatever cost*—then I speak in the same way. One cannot think of the odd hundred thousand it will cost for each factory. One can think only of the world we shall command by our initiative. It is a thing that does not affect only you and I, my friend. It affects the thousands of men we employ in our industry and the thousands of families who are dependent on it. To-night you and I are discussing a project which will be the turning-point, maybe, in the history of this Industry. We go ahead or we allow others to come in and take it from us. For remember, my friend, that if you and I see eye to eye—then the others will follow."

Mosenthal looked up from his book. Holbrook still stood, his back to the mantelpiece. Now he was fingering his close-clipped moustache.

"Ah, my friend," Mosenthal said quickly, "I have found here a saying. It is apt. 'Wisdom,' it says, 'is knowing what to do next; skill is knowing how to do it.' Now that is indeed apt. For I have the wisdom, Mr. Holbrook, because I see the way we must expand. You have the skill in running my factories so that every ounce is taken from them." He threw the book carelessly on to the desk by the window, and walked again to the mantelpiece and Holbrook. "Yes, that is indeed apt!"

A bell rang below.

"Ah," Mosenthal said, turning. "And so our friends arrive! You and I will talk to them," and he was again speaking closely into Holbrook's ear—whispering almost.

"We will explain our project. We will influence them—yes—And then at our meeting next Thursday we will discuss it with the others—having the backing of the ones who have come here to-night. It is so easy, my friend. It is so easy."

The door opened, Mosenthal quickly left Holbrook's side and walked across with a charming smile to greet Newcomb. Herbert Newcomb was a Director of several well-known companies. He, too, had promoted companies years ago. He was now interested in Fleet Street, owning, amongst other things, a prosperous weekly paper.

"Ah, Mr. Newcomb! I am glad you have come. I was worried. Such short notice and a Saturday, too. I am lucky to find you in London. A glass of sherry. Yes?" He led him in the same manner to the small table at the end of the room.

"I got your message when I returned from golf," Newcomb said. "I was out of town last night."

"It was fortunate, Mr. Newcomb."

"Anything startling, Mosenthal? This sudden call?"

"Startling! It is a word I do not like." He shuddered mockingly. "You men of Fleet Street! News is always 'startling' for you. It is not news otherwise."

Holbrook, who had nodded to Newcomb on arrival, still stood by the marble mantelpiece.

Newcomb laughed loudly and drank his sherry.

"I thought the new machines must have broken down. Or blown up."

"Ah, the imagination of you men! But then, without you, our breakfast-tables would be so dull. No, it is nothing. A little friendly discussion. That is all. Business is good. Never better. Mr. Holbrook has been telling me. He is beyond doubt enthusiastic. To-day, the results—Ah, they exceed all that we ever imagined!"

"Capital!" Newcomb said, looking at his glass as if he would like another sherry. Mosenthal noticed it and refilled it for him.

"I have the latest statistics here. They show amazing things. The imports of glass into this country. The world consumption. Truly the world is changing. We

will discuss after dinner, Mr. Newcomb. I have the idea."

"What is it?" Newcomb asked, who was the only member of the Board who treated Mosenthal with anything approaching disrespect. He was bluff, hearty. "Another inspiration?"

"Inspiration?—Maybe you call it that. I call it something different. But we discuss after dinner."

"Is it worth buying more shares? They're getting damned expensive. Greville keeps saying they'll touch ten before the year is out. Bless my soul, I believe he's right!"

Another sherry gulped down.

"The shares," Mosenthal said, "will go beyond ten."

"Your optimism is becoming appalling. I had a fit when you said they'd reach five."

"Optimism? That is a thing that Mr. Holbrook and I have discussed to-night. It is not optimism. It is merely knowing."

He turned as the door opened and Christopher Marling was announced.

"Ah, Mr. Marling. This is good of you. A sherry, yes?"

"If you don't mind—No." Marling bowed to Holbrook in front of him; to Newcomb on his left.

"How are things, Marling?" Newcomb asked. "I saw your son's engagement in the paper last week."

"Yes. She arrives in England the day after to-morrow," he said.

"The day after to-morrow!" Mosenthal answered. "That is indeed splendid. And the boy? How is he?"

Marling adjusted his black tie.

"Happy enough. Bound to be. Excited, you know. Naturally."

"Ah—this love!" Mosenthal cooed. "It is that which makes the wheels run smoothly."

"But you're a confirmed bachelor, Mosenthal!" Newcomb laughed. "What the hell do you know about it?"

"Ah! But I have seen!"

"I'm sorry if I appeared undecided, Mosenthal," Marling

said, as they all stood in their respective positions. "Fact is, I'd arranged to dine with my boy. The last nights, you know. Gathered this was important, so put it off."

"That was good of you, Mr. Marling."

Mitchell announced dinner.

The four men left the room. "I'll lead the way," Mosenthal said. Newcomb followed with a hearty blowing of his nose. Holbrook next, solemn and puckered. Marling last, upright, his grey hair curling above his ears.

They entered Mosenthal's ornate dining-room and sat down. The curtains were drawn although it was not yet dark. The only light in the room was thrown from the candelabra on the table. Marling undid his table napkin and laid it thoughtfully upon his knees. . . .

CHAPTER V

THE marriage of Hugh Marling and Barbara Brocklehurst took place one afternoon in the following November when the fleeting sun was pale amber coloured as it penetrated the crisp, keen air. St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, was the church they had chosen. For Marling it held many memories. He had married Effie in that church; Hugh had been christened there, and only illness ever prevented Marling from attending Divine Service there each Sunday. The pew that he rented was the same that he had always held. It had become, like everything else in his life, a tradition. It was but another link in the chain.

The weeks leading up to this marriage were for Marling eventful and varied. They toppled over each other; they moved too fast. He had found himself without time to adjust them. As he sat in the leather arm-chair in his study waiting for Hugh and Fortescue to return, he contemplated them—from the lunch at which Hugh had told him, until this morning of Hugh's wedding day, when he was waiting for an hour to pass before accompanying his son and best man to the church.

A fire crackled in his grate. It had been newly lighted.

He had returned from his offices earlier than was necessary, in case there should be anything that he could do. Besides, he found his work of minor importance that day. "I think I'll get back," he had said to Benson. And then Jordon had told him on arrival at No. 87 that 'the young gentlemen' would not be back until one o'clock. He had ordered a fire then, and had gone upstairs to change into his wedding clothes. A new frock-coat had been specially ordered; his trousers, too, which were extremely narrow, accentuating the length and thinness of his legs. And then he had returned to his study and had sat with crossed legs in his leather arm-chair, watching the flames licking the coal and listening to the fire as it hissed and crackled.

These three months had passed as at no time in his life. He thought of Hugh's homecoming; of how he had sat in that very chair before going up to change on the night of his arrival. And of his thoughts and hopes at that time. Of those three happy weeks before Hugh had told him of Barbara; of their evenings together; their dinners, just as he had planned them; their talks late into the night. And then Barbara. . . .

And the General's cable: "*Delighted. Letter on way.*" And the letter which had followed three weeks later; of how he had looked upon Hugh as a son, too, and that no other boy could have pleased him more as a son-in-law. He was in complete agreement on the question of early marriages—when young people knew their own minds. Of how Barbara was then on her way to England with her aunt, Mrs. Neilson. That things were changing for him, too. He had been recalled and was shortly to be offered a new command at Aldershot. He would be sailing home with his wife in a month's time and would prefer that no arrangements were made until he had had an opportunity of discussing things with Marling. But he had no objection to the engagement being made public at once. Such things as settlements could be left until that time. He ended his letter cordially, reciprocating the kind remarks that Marling had written. "*I remember Henry Barlow well. He has spoken of you often to me. If I may say so, you are spoken of, too, on all sides with*

the highest praise. Especially by your son." That had pleased Marling beyond all else. And then Barbara's arrival. . . . Hugh had gone down to Tilbury to meet the boat. Marling had preferred to meet them in London. Of how he had sat in this very chair, awaiting the arrival of Barbara, Mrs. Neilson and Hugh. Of the luncheon he had prepared with Mrs. Perks' assistance. And then he had heard, as he had with Hugh, the knock at the front door; Jordon walking across the tiled hall; the door opening; muffled voices; a sinking feeling in his heart and he was rising from his chair. And then his study door had opened. . . . His first impressions. Barbara in a summer frock, a large and flowing hat, coming towards him.

"You are Hugh's father?" she had said.

"Delighted, Miss Brocklehurst," he had answered, bowing stiffly over her hand.

Of Mrs. Neilson, the sister of Barbara's mother, he had little recollections then. She was a pleasant woman, he remembered—large and motherly. She had grey hair, too. But his eyes had seemed only for Barbara. He had watched her as she removed her gloves. She was certainly a charming girl. No question of that. Breeding, too. The way she moved. She had complete assurance. He had taken the summer coat she wore, placing it carefully over the back of that chair—the chair that stood by the side of his desk. Then he had turned to look at her again. Her hair was fair; her eyes were blue; it was all just as Hugh had said. The slightness of her; her ankles; her wrists; her waist. Her smile, too. Yes, she was certainly a young woman of considerable attraction, he had thought. And then Jordon had announced luncheon.

The commonplaces they had talked; the voyage; the heat through the Red Sea. It had all meant nothing to Marling. And Mrs. Neilson reminiscing with Hugh. Did he remember So-and-so? And So-and-so? They had done this and that thing. And Barbara on his left. He had tried to talk to her rationally—as if she were just a normal visitor to his house, instead of being someone who would usurp everything as time went on. He regarded

her as a Power. She was someone who had taken something that was indefinable from his own flesh and blood, altering completely the life that he had planned. That luncheon had ended. They had gone upstairs to his drawing-room. The sun had flooded the entire room; it had seemed brighter that day than ever before. He saw about him pieces of furniture, ornaments, pictures, that belonged utterly to Hugh's past.

"Hugh used to call that picture 'The Bogey Man,'" he had said, as he showed Barbara round. "The hooded cloak, you know. Yes, he was always imaginative." And here a table. "Do you see that join? Well done, isn't it? Hugh broke that leg when he was six. My wife. you know, liked the piece. Isn't worth much, of course. Sentimental reasons. Had it mended." And here an album. "Are you fond of photographs?" he had asked, opening the book that lay on the table by the piano. "Here he is with his mother. The first picture after he was born. Bonny little chap, wasn't he?" And so he had talked—Barbara listening intently, her blue eyes interpreting every word. Mrs. Neilson and Hugh on the large sofa by the window, discussing this person and that. So-and-so was home; So-and-so was up-country.

Coffee had arrived. Barbara had insisted on fetching the sugar for him when Marling had found that he had taken the wrong cup; and Mrs. Neilson didn't mind sugar at all, really. Barbara moved well; with distinction; with precision; with determination. She knew her own mind, he had thought. He had been glad about that. And her smile as she brought back his cup. "I put in one spoonful," she had said, and had come and seated herself beside him. "Is that right?"

"Most kind of you. Most kind."

"Why do you keep calling me Miss Brocklehurst?" she had asked, presently.

"'Pon my soul," he had said, "I keep forgetting. Not used to calling young ladies by their Christian names right away, you know. This is something new. Of course, you're going to be my daughter-in-law. Have to call you Barbara."

"And I," she had answered, "what am I to call you? Not 'Daddy,' because I've got one."

"Bless my soul. Never thought of that. Most awkward."

"I know," she had said, presently. "Pops."

"Pops!"

"Yes. Pops."

And then Hugh had entered into their conversation.

Pops! He hadn't cared for that.

Presently the party had ended. They had to go to their hotel; unpacking to do; things to see to. Hugh had escorted them. Marling had returned, then, to his office. Before leaving, Mrs. Neilson had said: "Your son, Mr. Marling, is a wonderful boy. They miss him dreadfully out there. And as for Barbara—she *adores* him."

He had shaken hands with both of them and had made arrangements for dinner that night. They were dining early and going to a play. He had watched them depart in their taxi and had then rung for Mrs. Perks to arrange about that early dinner.

Of his meeting again that evening with Hugh. "Dad, isn't she adorable? I just can't believe it. Seeing her again, you know. We've chosen the ring this afternoon."

The old enthusiasm. How good to see it!

"Yes. Yes. She's very attractive, Son. Deucedly pretty."

"But it isn't her prettiness, Dad. It's *her*."

"Yes. Yes. Great personality. Great character."

"That's it. She's *full* of character. Do you know, Dad, she had the whole of India to choose from, and yet she chose me?"

"Well, boy. Can't blame her for that."

And Hugh had blushed and pretended that he hadn't heard.

Of their dinner and theatre that evening. He had spoken chiefly to Mrs. Neilson, and was finding her a charming woman on further acquaintance. And Hugh, he had seen, was sitting near to Barbara in their box, their fingers interlaced.

"You're a darling—Pops!" Barbara had said, as he

had dropped them at the Ritz late that night, and she had looked up at him then from beneath those long lashes. They seemed strangely dark, those lashes, against that fair hair. And she had squeezed his hand as she had said that.

"We must get to know each other," he had answered. "Perhaps, when your aunt is busy, we might lunch together. Good idea!"

"I have to see my dentist to-morrow, Mr. Marling." Mrs. Neilson had answered quickly. "There are no dentists in India, you know, worth going to. I always go to the same man. To-morrow I'm going; I made the appointment before sailing. Do lunch with Barbara then. I never can eat after a dentist's, anyway."

They had talked then of the agonies of dentists, and Hugh, rather nobly, Marling had thought, had agreed to their lunching alone next day.

"I love Hugh," she had said at luncheon that day. "I love him more than any man I have ever known. Of course, Pops, I've known many men. I'm not going to be silly about that. I've been secretly engaged four times. But they were not like Hugh. I think I've always loved Hugh. He seemed different from all the others. He never made a fuss. He always—just did things. I love that." Then she had taken a cigarette from her case and lighted it.

Marling had never appeared publicly with a woman who smoked cigarettes. It was a new experience. He smoked his cigar with a greater comfort; he didn't feel the necessity for 'By your leave.' This daughter-in-law had begun to intrigue him. She was different, too, from all other women he had ever known. She had more assurance; she appeared less feminine; she seemed so able to look after herself. Her handbag had dropped during luncheon. "Now look here, Pops," she had said, "there is one thing. Never feel you have to be protective about me. Men never are. I hate being fussed over, anyway." It had seemed strange, that remark. Effie had always loved being fussed over; helping her on with her wrap; seeing that the rug was tucked round her in the car; the draughts; her medicine. Yet he could take no exception to that

remark. It was said so delightfully. It had not been a command. And the bag had been picked up long before he could have done it. An instant, and it was returned to the table. Her businesslike little hands, so small, he had thought, were clasping it. "Men never fuss over me," she had added. "So please don't, will you?"

"Of course. Of course."

And then of their future:

"Of course, Hugh is terribly ambitious," Barbara had said. "I always say he'll be Lord Chancellor one day. Nothing seems to stop him. If he says he'll do a thing —he just does it."

"Yes. Yes. He'll get on. I'm anxious for that. He'll have a great career at the Bar. You must help him, too."

"But I shall. I'm ambitious, too."

Good for her that, he had thought. Good for her!

"And you, Barbara—you and I must be good friends. Hugh and I, you know, we understand each other. I want you to feel that I am your friend, too. Hugh and I, you know, are like two brothers. We feel the same way. There are no secrets. I want you and I to be like that, too."

"But, Pops—that is what I want."

"Always tell me everything, child. I'm not inquisitive. Just interest, you know. I want to belong to your life too."

"But you will. 'Old Christopher,' Hugh used to say, is so jolly interested. Even in the smallest thing. By the way, I can't call you 'Old Christopher.' It's such a mouthful, isn't it?"

Then, with a smile that had ravished nearly every subaltern in India, she had taken another cigarette from her case and had lighted it with the stub of the old one.

Marling had watched, fascinated. It had been a new experience, this. And Pops! . . . No, he had not cared for Pops. And 'mouthful' . . . a strange word for such a charming young woman to use.

"It is, isn't it?" she had continued. "'Old Christopher'?"

"Yes," and then "Yes."

"After all, we must have a name for you, mustn't we? I can't call you Mr. Marling. 'Pops,' I think, is good. You like it?"

"Pops? Well, never heard the word before. That is, in this capacity. Suppose it's all right. Never thought."

"That means you **don't?**"

"Well, really, you know . . ."

"Then you *don't*."

She flicked her ash into the tray then and looked up at him. "This is very important," she had said, laughingly. "This name question. 'Pops' doesn't go down. 'Old Christopher's' too long." And then, suddenly: "I know—'O.C.'"

"O.C.?"

She clapped her hands together. "But that's *lovely*!—'O.C.!' So military, too! By the way, I've wanted to tell you ever since I saw you. You're terribly good-looking. You'd make a much better General than my father. You *look* the part. Daddy's so large *here*." And she pointed to her middle. "Yes, 'O.C.'s' lovely. I must tell Hugh. What do you think?"

"Well, really you know . . ."

And then her hand had reached across the table. "You *are* a darling, O.C.," she had said, and Marling had realized the pressure of cool fingers. "You're like Hugh. I feel so proud when I go about with Hugh. He looks so well. So do you. You might be anybody. A King, a Prince, an Ambassador. Something really intriguing. I was thrilled directly I saw you. Hugh will be like you one day. I can see it now. Hair as black as his always goes grey early and then his hair will be like yours. I suppose you were like that years ago, too. I'm glad your family doesn't go bald. When I first saw Hugh I thought he must be so conceited; he couldn't look like that without being conceited. That's why I left him alone. But he isn't. He is the simplest darling in the world. You're like that, too. When I said you were good-looking just now—you blushed. Yes you did. And look! There's no one in this room to touch you."

"Really, my dear . . ."

"But it's true." And then: "What was I saying before I became personal?"

Again that smile. Yes, Barbara was attractive, deucedly attractive. He was glad. They'll be a wonderful pair, he had thought.

"You were discussing my name," he said.

"Oh yes. You don't mind that name, do you? It's sym—sym—whatever-it-is."

"Symbolical—eh?"

"That's it. Symbolical."

Good for her, he had thought. O.C. In charge. Commanding Officer. Great, that, for his daughter-in-law!

"Well, that's settled," she had said with an air of finality.

"I suppose," he had said, presently, "you would not like a liqueur?"

"Well, O.C.," she had answered, mischievously. "Since you ask, I'll tell you something. Old brandy's my one weakness. Real old brandy in a large glass. Daddy had some marvellous stuff sent out after the war. He'd had it stored in Berry's cellars since before the war. Gee!" and she raised those tiny white hands and lifted her eyes, "it just went down! All silky and warm. Daddy kept it for special occasions. He'd only got four bottles left when I came away. . . ."

"Two brandies—in large glasses," he had said to a passing waiter, and he had wondered again at his new daughter-in-law. He was perplexed. One moment she had seemed part of him; the next she had belonged utterly to another world. Cigarettes, liqueur brandy . . . but she was attractive, deucedly attractive. Lovable. Yes, that's what she was. He could understand any young man wanting her. So complete, so self-assured, so extremely desirable. And yet that femininity—it was there in spite of her assurance. It was more than just being there—it stood out. It warmed, like the crackling fire in his grate. It drew people towards her, as that fire did on wintry evenings. He had begun to feel awkward then; ill at ease. This daughter-in-law-to-be stood for modernity in its most modern sense. He realized that. And he belonged utterly to the England of the past. In the moments while both had

warmed their brandies in their hands he had wondered at his next remark. What should it be? It must be modern, anyway. It was so essential that he had Barbara's friendship. 'An old fossil,' she might think him. That must never be. Times were changing. This cigarette, liqueur-drinking habit belonged to the post-war breed. He had seen it on every side during the last few months. He must keep pace. Yes, that is what he must do. So he said:

"I'm glad you like brandy, my dear."

"It's *mar*vellous," she had replied, smelling with the nose of a connoisseur, as she had held it in both hands.

"My best wishes," he had said, raising his glass.

"My love," she had answered, in reply.

"Good luck."

"Bless you, O.C."

A silence while both had drunk.

And then:

"You're attractive, my dear. Very."

"I've told you my reactions to you. But I'm glad you like me."

A twinkle in those blue eyes; a sudden reaching for his hand.

"Be good to Hugh," while he had held that hand again.

"I couldn't help it, O.C."

"You love him—very much?"

"Desperately."

"Good! Good!"

A releasing of that hand. A sudden shyness again. The waiter approaching; a nod for the bill. She was collecting her things; replacing her cigarette-case and match-box into the handbag that had fallen on to the floor during luncheon. He had watched her. Yes, she was certainly attractive, deucedly attractive. She excited one's feelings. That was what Hugh had said. He saw that. He had seen it all. Then she had taken the small mirror from her bag and had looked at herself. Small pieces of flaxen hair had curled at either side of her forehead, beneath her hat. Those tiny, supple fingers were patting them—guiding them into place. Then she had opened a small tube, presently spreading carmine on her lips. Marling had

never seen such things before. They belonged utterly to the secrets of the boudoir. Besides, Effie did not use such things. . . .

"Do you always do that?" he had asked, naïvely, but vastly interested.

"What, this? Make-up, you mean?"

"That stuff," he had answered, watching her intently.

"My dear O.C.! That's my stock-in-trade. I'm hideous without!"

"You seem very beautiful to me," he had answered, seriously.

And again, in the silence whilst she had made the centre of her lips into a cupid's bow, he had wondered again. It was so different, this. He had never imagined a daughter of his putting such things on to her face. It was vulgar, common, beastly. It belonged to the women of the streets. He was sure that they did such things. 'Enamel,' men called it. But his own daughter-in-law! It seemed appalling! And the liqueur brandies; and the cigarettes; two of them, one lighted from the other! How different from what he had imagined. And in a public restaurant! . . . But he had watched her and had seen the tilt of her head; the assurance; the charm that she radiated above all else. It seemed as if he had not known charm—of that sort—until he had known Barbara. Now she was putting away the tube with the red stuff inside. It had all been done with the air of a *Grande Dame*. It hadn't seemed to matter. Another time, another person, it would have revolted him; made him angry and ashamed. It was the way she had done it that had made the difference. This was modernity, he thought. His future lay that way. He must keep pace. . . .

"I'm ready, O.C.," she had said, her face lighting quickly into a smile. "Have you paid?"

"Yes, my dear."

Together they had left the restaurant.

"And where can I drop you?" he had asked, whilst a commissionaire hailed a taxi.

"Well, O.C., I'm going to my hairdresser's. It's in Dover Street."

"I'll drop you there," he had said. "What number?"

She had told him.

"Good-bye," he said, as he held the door open and assisted her out of the taxi outside the hairdresser's. "I see you again to-night, I think."

"At eight sharp, so Hugh says. He's so punctilious!"

"My wife's cousin, Mrs. Barlow, and her husband are dining. Anxious for you to know them, my dear. Have to meet all our friends now, you know. One of the family, eh?"

She had held his hand.

"And thank you for my lovely lunch. I have adored it. You're terribly sweet, O.C. Knowing you has made me more determined than ever. I'm glad Hugh's like you."

"Thank you, my dear," he had said, "for giving me that great pleasure," and he had bowed over her hand once more.

"You're not disappointed?"

Again that mischievous smile.

"I think, my dear, I would do the same as Hugh were I forty years younger."

"You sweet!"

Then he had released that hand for the fourth time that day.

"Till to-night at eight."

"Sharp!" Barbara had answered, severely; with mock severity.

A mutual smile and she had entered the hairdresser's. Marling, upright as usual, had entered the taxi again. He was driving back, later than was his custom, to his office.

Of his thoughts as he drove—of his thoughts on entering his office once more, he remembered little. They were but a hazy recollection. It had been a jumble. He had never imagined that a daughter-in-law of his would be like Barbara. She was something outside the life that he had known. He was disappointed. Of course he was disappointed. And yet he had seen that indefinable thing that Barbara had. It was physical; it made men do queer things. In history there had been women like that. Nell Gwynne was one. Those people were able to draw the

worst out of a man, and if they were right fundamentally, they would turn that worst into the best. They could play always on the emotions that they had created. Lady Hamilton, she had been another. Had she not been Nelson's inspiration at Trafalgar? Yes, women like Barbara could make men do queer things; great things; gallant things. And Barbara loved Hugh. She had loved him from the first, she had said. She would be Hugh's inspiration, too. Hugh would not be influenced by the more animal instincts. He would turn those instincts into finer feelings. He was chivalrous always. He needed, perhaps, a stimulus of that kind. Yes, maybe it was as well. Hugh was reserved. He needed bringing out. And it was that indefinable thing which Barbara had that could perhaps bring out that part of him. . . .

Marling began then to see things more clearly. He reached now for the poker and placed it under the fire, lifting it as he did so. That caused a draught. The fire burned more brightly. Pieces of coal that were dull red suddenly took shape, and became alive with flame. He left the poker there and lay back once more in his chair—his finger-tips together. Yes, he remembered now. Those had been his feelings that afternoon. He had even owned to his pride in lunching alone with her that day. People had turned round to look at them. That hadn't been because she had put carmine on her lips and had powdered her face publicly. If it came to that, other women in the room were doing the same thing. He had noticed that. It was just that Barbara was attractive in those ways that belong utterly to certain women. They seem to wear their clothes differently, those women. The shabbiest clothes seem straight from the Rue de la Paix when they wear them; the hat; even the shoes. They seem part of them. They seem the inspiration of their creator; as if in his wildest dreams he had meant them to be like that—to the last detail. As if *that* had been his ideal. They seem to move, as if every movement were a mocking invitation, those women. Marling had seen them; had read of them. They seemed to make every gesture a caress. So it had been with Barbara. When she had reached across the table and had taken

his hand at luncheon that day, it had been a caress such as he had never known. It had excited. That was what Hugh had said. And he had to own to that excitement. The coolness of her; the whiteness of her skin and arms. He had wondered at that, since she had spent so long in India. He remembered wondering about that when Benson had been talking to him on his return after lunch. Of how he had dismissed him with some petty excuse. It was all coming back to him now. "Benson," he had said, "my son's fiancée is a charming woman." "I'm sure, sir," Benson had answered. "But she is very charming," he had added. And presently, "I do not wish to be disturbed this afternoon. I have some important papers to read." And then Benson had left him, but he had no important papers to read. He had sat, instead, or had stood by his window, looking out into the street. Of course he was disappointed. She was strange, this young woman. She didn't belong to his life; his cosmic circle. She stood for all the things that he abhorred. She belonged to the type that went nightly to the Belton Hotel; he had seen them coming out. He had no wish to know that type. They did not speak the same language as he did. And yet Barbara had seemed different from all of those. Perhaps it was that he had never tried to know them before; that he had been too conservative in his ideas. They, too, might regard him as an outcast. He was perhaps too definite; too carefully moulded to a pattern. Yes, he had realized as he had stood that afternoon by the window in his office, that he must change; that he must develop. Above all, he must adopt modern ideas; that he must become more pliable; move more with the times.

He remembered how he had been concerned for Henry Barlow's criticism. Would he, too, understand this carmine, face-powdering-in-public point of view? Henry was of the old school, too. And in spite of everything, he had hoped that Henry would have some word of comfort; some word of praise; of genuine congratulation. And he had wondered about their dinner that night. Would Barbara take brandy again? And what would Henry think if she did? And Margaret? What would she say?

She was so part of Effie. Yes, Effie would not have approved. He had felt sure of that. But Barbara had not taken brandy. She had behaved in a most exemplary fashion. She had moved the whole dinner-table to her side by sheer attraction; the magnetism of which Hugh had spoken.

"Christopher, that young woman's amazingly attractive," Henry had said, smiling, urbane, his bald head pink and shining. "I never saw such a charming creature."

And Margaret, as she was leaving, her hand on his sleeve:

"She'll make such a beautiful bride, Christopher. That complexion! And so sweet, too." And then the familiar squeeze of his arm. "I'm so glad, Christopher. You deserve it." A nod, and she was following Henry down the stairs where their armorial car awaited them.

Of Mrs. Neilson: "I never saw a more attractive couple, Mr. Marling. Never." And the two children standing radiant, their hands interclasped.

Of Greville, who had made up the numbers, panting and breathing with difficulty: "Enjoyed my evening immensely, Marling. So good of you to ask me. An occasion like this, too. Most appreciated." And then into his ear. "And the girl! London will go mad, Marling, mark my words. She's too beautiful to be true. Mark my words, she'll cause a sensation." And he, too, had panted his way downstairs to be handed his hat by Jordon below.

Yes, he remembered that evening so well. The beginnings of many.

The poker had become red hot. He removed it and laid it carefully in the hearth. Yes, he remembered that first evening so well now. The remarks of his friends had given him comfort then. They had confirmed his impressions. His friends had found no harm in Barbara; they had found her, instead, possessed of a great charm; she was an asset to him in their eyes. "She'll cause a sensation," Greville had said. It was *he*, then, who was in the wrong. *He*, who had to adjust. And so he had begun immediately to adjust. He had lunched many times

with Barbara, and always the liqueur brandy had followed automatically. He once even held the mirror for her when explaining exactly how the line of the carmine on her lips was out of the true. And always the "O.C. You've given me a lovely lunch. I've adored it. Really." And of course they kissed, now. And usually: "You *are* an angel" when he had helped her into her taxi—or when he had dropped her anywhere afterwards. "Darling O.C." and she would wave and disappear. Yes, she was enchanting, this fair creature of twenty-four who seemed to possess all the knowledge and subtleties of her sex; all the most finished artistry. She was lovable, he had to own to that; even from the first. She was open; frank; there was no reserve in her nature. She just gave. That is, if she wanted to give. And then she gave wholeheartedly. She gave like that to Marling.

And of their house-hunting. That had been one of their first considerations. Even before the General had arrived. "We *must* find a house, O.C. It will sure to need altering, anyway. So even if we don't get married for months, we'd better see about it now, hadn't we?" And again that smile as she had sidled up to him, her fingers twitching as they had coiled round one another; her eyes mischievously downcast, hidden from his sight by those long dark lashes.

"Well, of course, my dear, there's no harm in looking around already," he had said. "Shouldn't be too impatient, though. Lots of good houses in the market if you give yourselves time."

"But we've seen the darlingest place, O.C."

Downcast eyes again; a fingering of one of the buttons on his coat.

Marling remembered the many 'darlingest places' he had been led to see. Hugh had always taken the saner view of the two, although his judgment had often been influenced in his enthusiasm. "This is just the place, Dad. Look at it! It's grand!" That was before he had even gone inside. That friendly laugh as he had taken Barbara affectionately by the arm and had led her, almost running, into the hall. "Look at it, Sweet. Look at this hall. Darling,

GOVT. GIRLS COLLEGE SPIN

it's just the place." From room to room they would scramble, sometimes hardly giving themselves time to take in the possibilities of each room.

And then Barbara would come upon some object that pleased her. Perhaps a window which was of unusual shape; a floor that sloped; a garden that was no garden at all, but which had been made into some attractive place where they would sit in the evenings and drink their coffee. Those were the things that had always intrigued them. And then Barbara would say: "O.C. You must own it's just the place. Look at that window! It's just the divinest thing I've ever seen!" But usually the drains had been wrong with those houses; or the leases had been too short; or the premiums had been out of the question. And their adjectives, Marling had noticed, were strangely alike; they used always the same expressions. These changed from time to time, but always both had used them at the same period.

And then the house they had found in Westminster. Again he had been led to 'view the premises.' This time it had been in Smith Square. He had felt before reaching there that this would end their searchings. For Marling, Smith Square possessed a charm of its own. The house, too, had thrilled them. He, too, would like them to live there. This time they had been entranced; they found everything there which had intrigued; fascinated. They planned the rooms right away. "Here the dining-room —of course," said Barbara. The drawing-room—well, there really wasn't room for that if Hugh wanted a study. But the study hadn't mattered. And so they had planned. The visits and revisiting. And always they had taken him with them. "What do you think?" And when all had been settled: "Of course, it's *divine* of you, O.C.," and he had felt those two white arms about his neck; the carmined lips pressing against his grey moustache; a hug; a squeeze. A sight once more of a flushed face; blue eyes. And then a rushing to Hugh. "*Darling*, but I'm so happy! You love it, Hugh?"

"Adore it, Sweet. *And* you."

A kiss, sudden and violent.

"Dad, it's damned good of you."

"Not a bit, my boy," and he had wiped his moustache discreetly in case any of the carmine had remained there.

The option of the house at Marlow had been allowed to lapse. Hugh did not want to live in the country; nor did Barbara. Nor did Marling; he had wanted them near.

Happy days they had been, he thought. He had been growing more used, too, to this sudden change in his life. He had found an added interest in the things which Barbara had brought into it. He had noticed Hugh's happiness, too. It had seemed to grow each day. And in spite of this new-found happiness of Hugh's, there had still been the dinners with Hugh alone, when Barbara had been dining elsewhere. They had sat in the long dining-room with their port, the red lampshades reflecting on the polished table. And Hugh was ever interested. "The new plant? How is it behaving?" 'Combines' had seemed to matter to Hugh as vitally as it had for Marling himself.

"Mosenthal's right, Dad, I think—this going ahead."

"Rather play for safety myself, Hugh."

"But the times, Dad. Everything's booming."

"I know, but will it last? Can it?"

"I can't see how it can stop. We've been standing still for four years—in one way. I mean, at home. We've got to put our own house in order and we've got improved methods of doing so. No, I think he's right. I'd do it."

"Curious chap, Mosenthal," Marling had said, and had awaited Hugh's reply.

"Damned clever. I only wish I had half his brain."

"You like him, Hugh?"

"Oh—it's difficult, that. We're such different ages. One can't like a man who is just a mask—a kind of figure-head. Mosenthal is a name. He stands for power. He talks to me and seems to like doing it and I'm damned proud when he does. But liking—well, one can never get down to him. Liking is affection," and then with a smile, "I can't say I feel affectionate about him, Dad. How do you feel?"

"Oh, I like him well enough. Can't understand the foreigner, anyway. Too gushing, Hugh. Too full of words. Another glass of port?"

"But it's attractive, that manner. It holds you. Barbara found him attractive. *Really* attractive. She often feels like that about ugly men."

"Does she? Help yourself, boy."

Yes, Mosenthal was becoming an interest in his life, too. Marling himself was flattered by the attention he gave to him. He seemed to listen attentively to his point of view. With the other Directors he was often rude; or as if he were teasing them. Rather like playing them with a foil, thrusting their minds here and there at will, and then driving home with his point. But it was never like this with him. Mosenthal seemed to respect him. Marling had noticed this and had noted it with a feeling of satisfaction.

He glanced again at the clock. It was only half-past twelve. Another half an hour. He lighted a cigarette; a curious thing for him to do before lunch. But he was strung up; nervous.

And the General, he thought, as he puffed his cigarette? A charming fellow. A great gentleman. Immediately they had seen eye to eye. From the moment their hands had met.

"Marling, I am delighted. This is a real pleasure." He had come into this very room, like the breath of a high wind. He was movement personified; bluff, honest, direct.

And Marling:

"It is indeed a pleasure."

Hands gripped; eye meeting eye.

Of their many conversations. He remembered them all. From his earliest discussions about Hugh, to their discussions regarding finance.

"You see, Brocklehurst, it may be unusual, but I am making over to Barbara five thousand shares in 'Combines.' They stand to-day at nearly £8. They're not Trustee Stock, of course, in the literal sense, but I've an idea they'll pay her better."

"Well, you're on the Board, Marling, you should know.

What will they pay?" And the General had puffed his cigar, which had seemed part of his face: he was always smoking cheroots.

"I'm giving her ordinary shares. They should pay ten per cent. Mosenthal says they'll pay more. Of course, it's unusual. It isn't Trustee Stock. I'm not regarding this as a settlement in its literal sense, either. Regard it more as a present. All I have is theirs, anyway, when I'm gone. And for Hugh—I'm doubling his allowance."

"That's generous of you."

"That's a thousand a year. Hugh has a few shares. Not much, you know. He's invested his gratuity. I've bought him a few more. Barbara will have the interest on the five thousand 'Combines' shares."

"And I," the General had said, "will continue her allowance. That's £200. They ought to manage."

"They should."

"You're being generous, Marling," the General had said. "Unfortunately a soldier hasn't much chance of saving. I wish I could do more."

"Nonsense, Brocklehurst. Nonsense. My only thought is whether I should make over those 'Combines' shares. Only for the best reasons I'm doing it, you understand. It will pay them better. No question of that. But it isn't usual, you know. They're not Trustee."

"But you are the best judge," the General had replied. "First-hand information. And you're a lawyer, too. I trust your judgment implicitly. And the house. You've been good about that, too."

"Oh, nothing. A twenty-one year lease. They won't want it for as long as that, of course. No room for expansion. No room for nurseries and such-like. One, yes, but no room for a large family."

The General had looked up then:

"Yes, of course, there's that," and he had flicked his ash into the grate.

"But they'll get their money back when they have to move. Property is going up there."

"Yes," the General had replied. "You think of everything, Marling," and they had both puffed their cigars;

both silent; both thinking; each perhaps on the same subject.

Yes, things were changing. In a quarter of an hour now the boys would return. He rose from his chair and stretched himself. It seemed strangely quiet in his house now; just as it had been the night that Hugh had arrived home. He felt that he could remain still no longer. A reaction was setting in. He left his study and went into the dining-room. The champagne stood on the sideboard. Good! Two bottles. And the table laid for three. He looked at the far end above the mantelpiece. Effie's picture looked down on him. But her face seemed sad to-day; her expression changed. He walked over to it and stood beneath it. . . . Dear Effie! What she would have given to have been here this day. Hugh's wedding day! He stood there, looking up at her; his hands behind his back; his body upright; his head erect. Dear Effie! They had often spoken of this day. "One day he'll marry," Effie had said. "I wonder who it will be?" . . . "It is Barbara," he was whispering now. "Barbara. We've grown old, my dear, you and I. We don't quite understand. But it's all right. They belong to a different world. That's what makes you and I sad to-day. But it's all right, that world. I've been amongst it lately. And I'm all right, too. They'll be living near." . . .

The front door opened some moments later; voices in the hall; the hurried opening of his study door.

"Dad!"

Marling blew his nose hurriedly and walked towards the door.

"I'm in here, boy."

"It's all fixed. Gerald's been marvellous. The bridesmaids' presents, the bouquet for the bride's mother, buttonholes for the ushers. Flowers for the church. It's all been done—and done wonderfully. We've just had a look in at the church. Gerald remembers everything."

"Good. Good."

"We'll have to change like lightning. Has Jordon labelled my trunks?"

"Expect so, boy. Expect so."

Together the two boys ran up the stairs, Hugh taking them two at a time.

Another wait. Marling paced the carpet of his long dining-room. The house had become alive once more. Cries of 'Jordon' from above. Things being moved; luggage coming down the stairs. People running up and down. 'Where's my tie?' 'Hurry up with the bath!' And presently they had returned, breathless; eager; flushed; happy.

"I think, sir," Fortescue said as he took his seat, "the sun is going to shine on the bride. That's lucky, you know."

"Could it help it?" Hugh answered, and began opening the champagne in the absence of Jordon who was engaged upstairs.

"Yes," Marling said, "the sun should always shine on a bride, Fortescue. It is a lovely sight."

Their hurried luncheon had been interrupted many times. Would Mr. Hugh want this packed? Or that? And he was putting the passports in the small attaché case. Would Mr. Fortescue make a note of that? And the big luggage had gone on now. The chauffeur was taking it to Victoria Station and was coming back for them.

The toastings:

"To Hugh and Barbara," Fortescue said, standing up, one foot on the chair.

And Marling:

"To you, Son. And to your bride."

The drive to the church, Marling watching the panorama as it passed the windows of his car. The boys talking earnestly; this and that. It was getting near now. One-forty-five. The wedding at two. The line of cars outside St. Paul's. Would they never get on? The people, too; the sightseers. Into the church at last—Hugh and Fortescue by the side door. Marling walked slowly up the aisle, his top-hat in his hand. A lot of people, he thought. There Benson and Miss Taperly in a back pew. The Campbell-Stewarts there. The Cunninghames. There the Hilliards. And Lord Spalding. Nice of him to come.

And Sir John Bowling. Here Clements. And Greville. Yes, and Mosenthal with him. Nice of him to spare the time. He bowed gravely to those who caught his eye. The Hardcastles, Zania looking attractive, too, deucedly attractive. A well-dressed congregation, he thought. And Lord Westwood. Lady Barrington . . . they had all come. Henry and Margaret in the front pew on the right, leaving a place for him. He bowed to Mrs. Brocklehurst and Mrs. Neilson before sitting down and finally kneeling silently in prayer. Hugh arrived with Fortescue. All eyes seemed to be upon him. From behind a strange voice : " Marling looks well. A good-looking chap, isn't he? "

" I like the look of him," a girl's voice answered.

" You'll meet him presently. Do you know the girl he's marrying? "

" No."

" Nor I. Anxious to have a look at her. He had enough to choose from."

More whisperings from behind.

" That's Marling's father. Not the bald-headed one. The one on his left, sitting very upright."

A silence; the choir was entering and walking slowly down the aisle. The whole congregation at attention. Hugh and Fortescue were standing in front of Marling, their backs towards him. A waiting. He saw Hugh's hand fidgeting nervously. He looks well, he thought. He looks well. A whole head taller than Fortescue. . . . Heads turning round in the direction of the door. A sudden burst of music; boys' voices singing, mingled with the tenors and basses as they followed after. Barbara on the General's arm; Hugh taking his place beside her. . . . The service had an infinite beauty for him—a beauty that was increased by its pathos. He watched Hugh place the ring on Barbara's finger, and then Marling looked straight ahead once more. Soon they were in the vestry. Hurried words; a kiss for the bride. Conversation that he did not take in. He escorted Mrs. Brocklehurst down the aisle as the Wedding March was played and saw his own pew as he passed. Effie's place was empty. No one was sitting there. . . .

The drive to the Hyde Park Hotel round the corner. The usual remarks. The bride, how lovely she had looked. But Marling seemed far away. It was all over now! The crowds at the reception. The speeches. Especially Henry's. He spoke like a born orator; he always did. Specially prepared, this speech, too, Marling had felt. But still, he was grateful. Henry had replied for the family. Marling's own words had sounded so lame; so insincere. He had not meant them that way. But words would not come that day; he seemed stilted; nervous; as if he were afraid to speak too feelingly. Perhaps that had been why.

And the chatter all round him. "Won't you dine with us to-night, Mr. Marling?" Mrs. Brocklehurst had asked. "My husband's giving a small party."

"Most kind of you. Most kind. If you'll excuse me, I have things to do. Been rather neglectful lately. This wedding, you know. The boy. Things to arrange. . . ."

He passed on.

They were waiting now for the pair to go off. Marling slipped away and went upstairs. He knocked at Hugh's door.

"Come in!"

Hugh was in a lounge suit, putting the final touches; the handkerchief in his breast pocket; the set of his tie.

"Didn't Barbara look stunning, Dad? God, how white suits her!" His face was flushed, as Marling had never seen it before; his eyes were shining with a dazzling brilliance.

"And the sun—it shone, Dad—it shone! That's lucky, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's very lucky."

"You must see Barbara. She's only along the passage."

"I will. Good-bye, Hugh."

Hugh turned:

"Good-bye, Dad."

Their hands gripped, as in a vice.

"You've been damned good to me."

"Nonsense."

"I shan't forget it—ever."

"It's been a pleasure, boy."

"I appreciate it. I've loved these months with you."
"So have I."
"I'll miss '87,' too. And our evenings together."
"So shall I."
And then:
"Bless you, Dad."
"Good luck, Hugh."
Their hands parted. Marling turned quickly and left the room. Barbara was in the passage, coming towards him, followed by many attendants.
"Isn't Hugh ready?"
"Yes. Just ready."
"We'll see you in two months then?"
"Yes, two months."
"Kiss me again."
He obeyed. Again those white arms were about his neck; the feel of carmined lips upon his; the pressure of those arms around him; a final hug.
"You're *such* a darling, O.C. I'm so glad Hugh's like you."
"Be good to him, my dear," was all he said, and passed on down the passage and down the stairs. Below was pandemonium. People with rose petals were waiting to strew their path. "Are they coming?" seemed on everyone's lips; if not, it was in their minds. Marling accepted some leaves from a girl at the bottom of the stairs. "You must throw some, Mr. Marling, it's so lucky."
"Thank you, my dear, thank you."
He walked straight on and stood by the steps in front. A sound of voices came from within. Yes, here they came. Walker, his chauffeur, at the wheel; a commissionaire holding open the door of the car. Shouts and they were passing laughingly, a shower of rose petals after them; the crowd following, too. A wave and the car was moving. Marling waved in return. Two happy faces through the window. They were gone now. They had slipped round that 'bus. Yes, there it was, cutting in again! Now it had gone; it was lost in the maze of traffic. The crowd dwindled; the guests returned slowly inside. . . . A feeling of flatness.

"A jolly good wedding, sir," the commissionaire said, returning up the steps.

"Yes."

"You're the bridegroom's father, aren't you, sir?"

"I am—yes."

"Well, I suppose it's a great day for you, sir. A great event."

"A milestone, my man. Another milestone."

The commissionaire looked at him and saw those eyes still searching amid the traffic.

"You never throwed your flowers, sir," he said, jokingly.

"No," Marling said, looking suddenly at a crumpled mass of paper leaves in his hand. "No."

The commissionaire became suddenly busy with a new arrival; he was down the steps opening the door of a car.

Marling's fingers opened. The petals fluttered to the ground. A sudden breeze carried them away. . . .

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER VI

IT was long past midnight, but the music was still playing. The house with the pillar-box red door had opened many times since dinner to allow more revellers to enter. The line of cars in Smith Square was assuming large dimensions. As one of the chauffeurs had remarked —"Lord knows 'ow they all gets in." But still they had come. A car would drive up: a butler would open the door. Then a burst of light from within, and a scream of laughter at each entrance. Then a voice; someone was singing. "Sings well, that bloke," the same chauffeur said, determined to pass the time of night. Then the red door would open; a couple would come out—followed by another; and another. Slowly they would parade the square in leisurely fashion—arm linked in arm. The music from the open windows continuing from above. A couple would return. A sharp knock on the silver knocker. The door opening; then closing. It was a continuous procession, in and out.

The grotesque costumes they wore accentuated the stillness of the night. "Fancy Dress Party orlright!" the talkative chauffeur said to his neighbour. "Catch their death of cold, too, if they ain't careful." Then a sudden burst of laughter from above. "A proper caution up there somewhere! Bet it's the bloke I brought. 'Im disguised as a butcher, with the apron. The fat party. Bet it's 'im. 'E came with my lot."

A grunt from his sleepy companion who was smoking his cigarette with the glowing end held backwards, hidden in the palm of his hand. "Been 'ere before?" asked the same man again, exhaling noisily through his teeth.

"No."

"Well, take it from me, we're 'ere for the night."

"That so? Lively, eh?"

"*Lively!* Blimy, they're 'arf mad, this lot! Always up to some newfangled idea. Last time I came 'ere it was a party where they all wore Russian clothes. All the blokes in top-boots. Vodka they drank. Strewth! *Lively!*" He spat then over the corner of the radiator as he leant against a wing. "Never saw the like of it before. Singing. Dancing in the street. A proper mix-up if ever I saw one."

"What's the name?"

"Who—the bloke what's giving it?"

"Yus."

"Marling."

"Bit of money, eh?"

"A tidy bit, I should say."

"Well," and the sleepy one yawned and stretched himself. "I'd find a better way of spendin' it," and then shivering; "I'd give 'arf a dollar to be in bed."

"That'll be some time then, chum. Take it from me."

The music burst out anew. The talkative one hummed the words:

I never realized what you were to me,
I never realized that such a thing could be.

"There's that bloke singing again. 'E was 'ere last time I came."

The sleepy one smoked silently.

"Funny," he said, "to think that a year or so ago we was in France. Suppose you were, mate?"

"I was there orlright. Ypres, Cambrai. . . ."

"So was I. Transport?"

"Sappers."

"R.A.S.C.—me."

"Cushy?" asked the talkative one.

"Not that you'd notice."

"Good times, though."

"Never saw the fun of it meself."

"Gawd! That was *living*, that was! Call this living? Why, it's nothing short of *ennui*!"

"What?"

"*Ennui!* French for fed-up. You know? You ain't forgotten 'ow to parlez-vous, 'ave yer?"

"Never did much of it," answered the lugubrious one.

"Well, give me France every time. This sort of life kills me. Night after night, 'angin' about outside other people's 'ouses! Why, it takes the 'eart out of a bloke!"

"I usually sits inside and 'as a read."

"Do yer?" said the talkative one. "That don't appeal to me."

"Better than 'angin' about in the cold, anyway."

"Well, of course, I don't allow no grass to grow under *my* feet. Bored, I may be. But I'll always take an interest in things. Life, you know. See a lot of life as a chauffeur. Many's the tale I could tell, if decency didn't prevent!"

"'Ow's that?"

"Well, I work for a lively party," he explained, expansively. "Miss Pakenham. Miss Sybil Pakenham. Lives in Lyall Street. You know—orf Eaton Square. Well, I don't say nothin', of course, but I *sees* an 'ell of a lot." He was puffing at his cigarette. "It's interestin', you know," he continued, "if you takes the trouble to look."

"Pakenham? Don't my guv'nor know 'er?"

"Most people do. What's 'is name?"

"Blenkinsop."

"Blenkinsop? Seem to know it. Live in Tite Street?"

"Yus, Number 258."

"I know. I've dropped 'im there. Tall party?"

"Yus. Used to be in the Grenadiers. First battalion."

The music stopped; more laughter; more hilarious than ever.

"I bet it's the bloke what's disguised as a butcher," the talkative one said, looking up again.

"Who is he?"

"Don't know 'is name. Never seen 'im before. Came in our party to-night. Seems a good friend of my lady's, though. Of all of them, if it comes to that. Who's in your lot?"

"Oh—there's a Mr. Hughes," drawled his friend, in a tired voice, puffing at his cigarette which glowed each time

in the small of his hand. "'E and Mr. Blenkinsop was in the first battalion together. Then there's a Miss Loring. The other young lady I don't know. Don't care, neither. Not much to look at."

"Loring?" mused the talkative one. "Is that Miss Pat Loring?"

"Don't know 'er other name."

"There's a Miss Pat Loring what knows my lady. Small party? About my size?"

The lugubrious one looked at him.

"Yus, about your size," he answered. "Fair 'aired."

"That'll be 'er. Lives in Belgrave Square?"

"Believe she do." Then—"Yus, she does. I've dropped 'er there."

"I know 'er. My lady knows 'er, too."

"You seem to know all of 'em," the lugubrious one said, not a little enviously.

"Well—Chum, you can't go about with my lady without meeting most of 'em. They all goes about together." He felt then in his pockets for another cigarette. "Got a fag on you?" he asked.

'Chum' fumbled in his pockets and handed him a crumpled Woodbine.

"Thanks," he said. "Know the Sparkes at all?"

"Sparkes? No, never 'eard of 'em. Where do they 'ang out?"

"Up St. John's Wood way. They're another lot such as these."

"Who?"

The talkative one pointed with a lighted match to the pillar-box red door. "Always 'avin' parties. You'll come across 'em, I expect."

'Chum' shivered again and stamped his feet.

"Well, I wish I was in bed," he said. "I'm fed up with this."

"'Arf a mo'—'ere comes 'is Nibs!"

"Who?"

"The butcher. *The caution!*"

The lugubrious 'Chum' looked towards the red door.

"And 'is 'ostess with 'im," he continued confidentially

into his ear. "Keep quiet, Chum. 'E's worth 'earin'. A proper turn!"

Two people descended the small step from the door and turned into the street. In a moment they were passing.

"Bertie, your stomach is divine!" the girl was saying in passing, arm linked in the man's. "Where *did* you get it?"

"Clarkson's. Not bad, is it? Deucedly hot. Are butchers always fat, darling? The man assured me they were."

Then their conversation became indistinct; they were out of earshot. Two pairs of eyes followed them.

"That's 'er," said the talkative one. "That's Mrs. Marling."

"What's she supposed to be?"

"Couldn't say. The Queen of Sheba, shouldn't be surprised. 'Andsome-lookin' woman, ain't she?"

"Looks orlright, I suppose," 'Chum' agreed grudgingly. "Funny 'ow these people talk so free. Did you 'ear 'er mention 'stomach' to the gentleman?"

"Stomach! That's nothing! You should 'ear 'em sometimes! Stomach's treacly to some of the things they says. You should 'ear my lady! Gawd, she can't 'arf talk!"

The lugubrious 'Chum' yawned again.

"Don't care for it meself," he said. "Never did. I like a woman to be womanly."

"But that's the war."

"The war! It's always the war. Why should it be the war? Why should the gentry suddenly talk so vulgar? It didn't used to be."

"It's the war, I tell you. 'Earin' the blokes talk in the wards, maybe, when they was nursin'. Getting back to nature. It's always like this after wars."

"Well," 'Chum' said. "Careful! 'Ere they come again."

Laughter up the street coming nearer; the music from above still ringing out through the clear moonlight night.

"And you never told me, Bertie," she was saying. "You might have done that."

"But, my dear, how could I? I just arrived and then —well, Sybil brought me along."

"Well, it's good to see you, anyway. How long are you staying?"

"Maybe I shan't go back."

"That's marvellous, Bertie—another turn?"

"Yes—let's."

They turned and started to walk again up their side of the Square.

"It's hot inside—with this stomach," he said, still taking her arm.

"Poor darling! I'm cold in this."

"My dear!" And they both stood, "I never thought. A coat? A wrap?"

"Perhaps we'd better go in," she said. "They'll want some more Punch, anyway. Give me a hand with it, Bertie—will you?"

"Of course, my dear. Don't know much about it, though."

"I've a book," she said.

"Mrs. Beeton?"

"And others. What I don't know about cooking isn't worth knowing."

"I can't see you running a house, Barbara."

"Hugh thinks I'm marvellous."

"So he should."

"Well, come along inside. Damn! I haven't a key."

A knock on the silver knocker; the door opening; both disappearing.

"Well, I can't say 'e's much of a comic," 'Chum' said, after the door had closed. "I've 'eard better, I must say!"

"Well, you can't expect a bloke to be comic *all* the time, mate. Comics never are. Clowns, they says, are the most un'appy people when they're not clownin'. 'E 'ad 'em all in fits comin' along."

"Did 'e?" grunted 'Chum' unbelievingly.

"And that bloke certainly can play the piano," he said, when the music above eventually stopped. "'E was 'ere last time, too."

Still uninterested, ' Chum ' yawned and stretched himself again.

Suddenly :

" 'Ere, ain't this one of your lot ? That Miss Loring ? "

' Chum ' looked casually towards the red door which had opened again. " Yus," he said nonchalantly, " that's 'er."

" Thought I remembered 'er." And then : " That's 'er 'ost with 'er, too."

" The tall gentleman ? "

" Yus. Mr. Marling."

" Never seen him before."

" Nice chap. Very civil. It's usually a glass of beer for the boys if 'e sees us. Good evening, sir," he added, in a rather louder tone.

" Good evening," said the tall gentleman. " Tired of waiting ? "

" Oh no, sir. Quite 'appy, thanks very much."

" You're Miss Pakenham's chauffeur, aren't you ? "

" That's right, sir. You saw me last time."

" Well, I suppose you could all do with a drink, eh ? "

Two other chauffeurs had edged suddenly nearer.

" Very kind of you, I'm sure," from the talkative one. " Wouldn't say ' No,' " ' Chum ' volunteered, as if granting a favour. " Thank you, sir." " Could do with one," from the other two.

" I'm afraid I can't ask you all in," he smiled.

" That's orlright, sir. Out 'ere will do."

" Half a minute, Pat. I'll just see Bertram."

The tall gentleman went back into the house, Pat remaining outside.

" Strikes cold, Miss, don't it ? "

" It's a lovely night," she answered, pulling her cloak around her.

The tall gentleman returned.

" My butler will bring something out to you," he said, taking the fair lady's arm.

" Very kind of you, sir."

Then the tall gentleman and his fair-haired companion walked up the same side of the Square.

" Nice bloke, that ! The proper sort. Some places

you don't get as much as a smile. 'E always *looks* cheerful, anyway."

"A tall feller," said the third chauffeur.

"'Olds 'imself well, too," said the fourth.

"Ah, 'ere's old Bertram. Good evening, Mr. Bertram." Then aside—"Treat 'im friendly, Chum. 'E ain't as frightenin' as 'e looks." And then: "A good party, eh, Mr. Bertram? A bit lively, ain't they? A bottle of Bass? Not 'arf!"

For each man a bottle of Bass.

"Would you like anything to eat?"

"No thanks. Never could eat at this hour of the night. Gives me the indigestion proper."

The distinguished-looking Bertram stood by while they drank. The tall gentleman and the fair lady passed again.

"Good 'ealth, sir! And to you, Miss."

A charming smile from both of them and they were entering through the door that Bertram had left open.

"'Ow are things goin', Mr. Bertram?" asked the talkative one, wiping the froth from his moustache. "Goin' to be much longer?"

"The young ladies and gentlemen are just cooking sausages," he replied. "That's the beginning of the end, as it were. Another hour, I should say."

"Blimy!" 'Chum' said, alarmed. "That'll be three o'clock!"

Bertram then collected the glasses and the empty bottles and returned inside. The other two went back to their respective cars.

"Another hour of this!" 'Chum' grumbled. "And me up at eight to-morrer!"

"But it's life," said his friend. "Seein' things. 'Earin' things." But the chauffeur of the next car on the rank had returned, too, to his car. . . .

Presently the door opened. A woman spoke:

"A lovely party, darling. Marvellous! See you to-morrow. Ring me."

And the man:

"Thanks awfully, Barbara. I've loved it."

A girl in the doorway, smiling.

"Good-bye. Bless you. Lovely to see you both."
Mutual waves; the door closed; a searching for cars.
"Can I help, sir?"
"Thank you."
The talkative one ran quickly into the middle of the road:
"Calthorpe! Calthorpe! *'Urry* up!"
"'Ullo," from the end of the queue.
An engine started, a car moved. The talkative one waited to open the door.
"Thank you."
"Not at all, sir."
The woman turned and smiled at him as she entered.
"Thank you," she said.
"Not at all, madam. A pleasure, I'm sure."
"Do you know who they were?" he asked his disgruntled friend, on returning.
"No. Don't care, neither."
"Don't you? Well, their name's Calthorpe."
"I've got ears."
"But you don't make no use of 'em! That bloke plays for England. Scrum 'arf, 'e is. Ain't that interestin' enough?"
"I only watches soccer meself."
"Blimy! You must be sickenin' for somethin'!" With that he walked away disgustedly and began rubbing the brass radiator of his car with his coat sleeve, where the water had boiled over and had left its mark.
More couples emerged; much laughter; the red door opening and closing to let them out. Cars starting up; handles being cranked. Conversation between the two chauffeurs ceased. Both smoked silently at their respective cars, interspersed with occasional bursts of song from the chauffeur at the end of the queue, whose good spirits were not easily damped.
Presently: "'Ere—wake up, Sunshine! 'Ere's your lot coming out!"
Two men disguised as sailors walked down the steps, ridiculously small hats on their heads; one wore a red nose. Following them, a small fair girl wearing an Italian officer's cloak which reached nearly to the ground. Her dark companion was taller. She wore a crinoline and small

dark curls hung down either side of her head. They stood talking to the tall young man who was giving the party.

The talkative one left the radiator of his own car and sidled up to the bending figure trying to crank up.

"'Ere, I'll give yer an 'and," he volunteered amicably. "Bit cold, eh, Chum?"

"That's orlright," 'Chum' answered, not caring to accept favours.

"'Ave it yer own way, then!" And then into his ear: "That's Blenkinsop, ain't it—with the red nose?"

The lugubrious one turned:

"Yus," he said. "It is."

"Just coming, Smart," the red-nosed man called.

"Right, sir."

The party walked towards them.

"And Hugh," the small fair girl was saying, "I think Barbara looked too lovely. I just couldn't take my eyes off her."

"She is lovely, isn't she, Pat?"

And the red-nosed sailor:

"Good night, Marling. Awfully decent of you to ask us. It's been enormous fun."

The tall young man saw them into their car and then, with a wave and—"See you all soon," he returned indoors. The talkative one walked up to his friend as he was slipping into gear:

"They christened you all wrong, Chum, when they called you Smart!" he chuckled. And in reply to a most unfriendly scowl, "We'll meet again soon. Sure to. Late parties are the fashion this year," and "Try Phospherine!" he called, as the car sped away.

Alone, he returned once more to his own car—and waited. Presently the butcher appeared, his apron still intact. His own mistress and four others followed. The fair young 'Queen of Sheba' and the tall young man appeared, too.

"Good night, Sybil," the young man said.

"It's been divine," she answered.

And the fat man:

"All come and lunch with me at the Belton to-morrow."

"Love to," from all of them.

"Good night, Bertie. It's good to see you again," the

tall young man said, shaking his hand. "It's like old times. Do you remember Poona?"

"Rather, we'll dig in again to-morrow, Hugh. Good night, Barbara. A grand 'do'!"

"I'm invariably the last to leave," Sybil Pakenham said, getting into the car in elegant and studied fashion. "I am, aren't I?"

"The very last," the tall young man replied.

"She always goes home with the milk," from the fat man. "It saves getting up to let it in!"

The talkative one cranked his car and jumped into his seat.

"Good night, sir. Good night, madam."

"Rump steak's cheap to-day," cried the fat man from the window. "Or a nice cut off the joint?"

"Not to-day, butcher," from the fair-haired girl. "We're changing our custom. Your meat's too tough."

"That was knuckle!"

As the car started, the fat man fell back upon the other passengers. Shrieks of laughter greeted his fall. The talkative one touched his peak respectfully and the car glided away.

As the pillar-box red door closed and the bolt was drawn, the tall young man took the 'Queen of Sheba' into his arms.

"Darling," he said. "You're quite lovely." He said it impulsively; as if he couldn't help it.

"Am I, Hugh?" she answered. "You like me as a Slave Girl?"

"A Slave Girl? I didn't know what it was."

"But the bangle, Hugh! One on my ankle, too. Look!"

The tall young man looked at the bangle and kissed her wrist tenderly.

"God, but I love you, Sweet!" He kissed her then on her mouth, quickly; passionately.

They walked together into the dining-room.

"It's been fun," she said. "All of it," and she sank into a chair.

Empty glasses were all around her.

"You're a marvellous hostess," he said.

"I adore it." And she lay back into her chair. The

tall young man saw the tilt of her head, and kissed her again, under her chin, and then the whole of her neck.

"You're just too beautiful," he said, quietly, and stroked her hair. "Just too beautiful."

She looked up at him.

"And you, Hugh, are lovely, too," she said.

"I could go on looking at you—always."

Then her eyes screwed up; a mischievous smile.

"A party *sometimes*, though," she cooed.

A frown, hardly perceptible, crossed his face.

"Not too many," he said.

"Why?"

"Well, expense, you know. . . ."

"We're not hard-up yet, Hugh, are we?"

"Oh no. Of course not," he added quickly. "But the honeymoon. Moving in and all that sort of thing. We'll have to go slow for a bit, Sweet."

A pause. Then:

"All right. But you think I'm extravagant, don't you?"

"Nothing is too good for you," he replied.

"I suppose I am," she said, thoughtfully.

"Nonsense," and he stroked that fair hair again.

"Yes, I'm afraid I *am* extravagant, Hugh. I do love doing things—having things—people about me all the time."

"Life," he said. "That's what you love. And why not? Only we'll go slow for a bit. You won't mind, will you?" He looked at her.

"I'd mind nothing," she answered, "with you, Hugh," those blue eyes looking earnestly into his. Then he took her by the hands, lifting her almost from her chair, and together they walked up the stairs to their room.

Presently the house was in darkness. The quiet returned once more to the Square.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Barbara Marling returned to London in the January of 1920 and entered into the life of London at that time, she had, as Greville had prophesied for her,

caused a mild sensation. It had been accentuated by the fact that Hugh had been out of England for so long and the younger generation had not known him intimately —the younger generation that was the night-life of that time. Consequently the sight of Barbara, with her almost flaxen hair, dancing frequently with a tall and good-looking young man had caused much comment among them. They seemed together always ; and they so obviously enjoyed being together. Women raised their lorgnettes and watched them as they passed. Many people looked round. Who were they ? Giovanni, the *maître d'hôtel* at the Belton Hotel, had come to their rescue. They were Mr. and Mrs. Marling, recently returned from their honeymoon.

They had, at first, kept much to themselves on their return. They mixed little with the younger set. Giovanni, from his point of view, had always been pleased to welcome them. They were decorative, both of them. They paid well and drank always the best champagne. A better table was always found for them and placed at their disposal, with much ceremony. They received better attention, too ; Mr. Marling tipped well.

The news of the coming of this flaxen-haired girl into their midst spread quickly. The young men of that period spoke of her with admiration. She must be Scandinavian, they thought, to look like that. And yet she was so slight ; so infinitely small. When dancing with the man they had soon learnt to be her husband, her face seemed always looking up into his ; smiling ; talking ; alive always. She was infernally attractive, they said. They wished that she hadn't been married. But they liked to watch her, all the same. Even when she was in repose, one caught men at other tables looking round discreetly ; or pretending that they weren't, but looking in spite of it. Before long 'The beautiful Marling girl' or 'The beautiful Mrs. Marling' was the subject of much discussion. She made friends quickly. Those friends brought others ; a chain had begun ; it grew. The house in Smith Square became the meeting-place of young people. Young men sent her flowers after they had dined. They wrote notes, too, thanking her most profusely, which they did not

worry to do when dining with less attractive women. Within a short space of time she had a large following.

Women, of course—the younger ones—found her a thorn in their side. She had descended suddenly upon the little world in which they had held sway, and they were quickly losing the power that had been theirs. These young women, especially Sybil Pakenham, found many unpleasant things to say about her which the men were unable to see. "Of course, you're a man. You wouldn't!" had always been Sybil's retort when her guile had been unsuccessful. There were others, like Patricia Loring—the ever faithful Pat—who could find nothing good enough to say of her. She was pretty, she was sweet, she was kind. Above all, she was generous—in mind. And Pat had been at school with Barbara; she was a privileged person.

The name 'Barbara Marling' arose frequently when young women met together. Had they seen what she was wearing at So-and-so's party?—'Must have cost the earth.' And the way she was doing her hair now; drawing it away from her forehead. Terribly attractive. Other women followed quickly. Within two months she had seemed to be the leader of the younger generation.

And all the time the least affected person had been Barbara Marling herself. She just did things. The fact that they raised comment or consternation caused her little or no concern. She had not noticed it. Her complete self-assurance came to the fore, as it had done in every other situation in her life. But in this case it came to the fore through her complete ignorance of it. People marvelled at her being so unspoiled. But then Barbara had always been treated that way. An early introduction to India had accentuated that, too. She took those attentions always as a matter of course. If people had slighted her, she had not noticed it. That was because Barbara had never noticed the sort of people who would slight her. She just took the best from every side and grasped it firmly with both hands. The rest she had left for the others to enjoy. It was not a selfish grasping, which said immediately: "I must have that. Give it to me." She

just said: "I like that. It interests me." And when she became interested—especially in people—they became more than interested in return.

Stories were built around Barbara in a short space of time. She was this; or she was that. And, of course, at the moment, the man was So-and-so. But always those stories had been dispelled when Hugh and Barbara had entered a restaurant or some public place together. Their obvious interest in each other which belonged utterly to themselves. It could belong to no one else when they behaved like that. And before long those stories had reverted to the other extreme. "She adores that husband of hers," men said. And women: "They're terribly in love. Rather sweet!"

By the end of May 1920, their circle had extended. It included the Army, the Navy on leave, the Foreign Office, the Bar, odd men of independent means, and anybody who amused. Their womenfolk comprised relations of the above sections, and odd females who had been found by Barbara to be 'intriguing' and were consequently asked to Smith Square. Or odd menfolk—artists, pianists, singers, sculptors. Then there had been Hugh Marling's own friends—soldiers, old and re-found school-friends, and men from his club. Barbara had always done the 'finding' of the new and more 'precious' people. The most modern thoughts were expressed in their house. People sat anywhere and discussed them; on floors, ends of sofas, arms of chairs. Their small house was always full to overflowing. People in that quiet and charming Square had often felt like complaining of the noise. But, somehow, one never felt like complaining about Barbara Marling. Some had gone so far as to call at the house. Barbara had met them—full of apologies. "I'm so *dreadfully* sorry. I am really." And the wrinkled forehead on that tiny face had seemed all wrong. It *had* to be dispelled at once. So they said: "Oh, it doesn't matter at all," and they had become friends from thereafter.

The afternoon following Barbara's Fancy Dress Party, a taxi drew up, at a quarter to four, outside her house. Bertram opened the drawing-room door and announced gravely:

"Major Raynes, madam."

Barbara turned as she sat at her desk and jumped up quickly.

"Bertie!"

"Some flowers. That's the correct thing, isn't it?" He held in his hand a large bunch of roses and grinned good-humouredly.

"But they're divine. Bertram, put them in water quickly. But why all this, Bertie?"

She looked at him, running her hands over her hair, as all women do when they are caught unawares.

"I just saw them in Solomon's."

"But they're lovely. Take them, Bertram, please."

Bertram obeyed and left the room. Barbara straightened her frock, pulling it down first at the back and then at the front.

"You always liked flowers," he said.

"That's sweet of you. Here! Don't smoke your own. Stinkers?"

He took a Virginian cigarette from a cut-glass box.

"I'm not quite in the mood to be called on," she said, as she held a lighted match. "Frankly, I ought to be snoozing. Your lunch, Bertie, was a dream."

"Who's the lucky man?" he asked, looking towards her small desk in the corner, with a twinkle in his eye.

"The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker—bills, Bertie, bills."

"You pay yours?" he asked, still that twinkle.

"On the nail," she answered. "That's one of Hugh's rules. We have rules, you know. We drew them up before we married."

"Rules are made to be broken," Bertie said, inhaling.

"Not Hugh's," she answered.

She leant back and pressed the bell.

"And to what," she asked, "do I owe the honour of this call?"

"Well," he answered. "I'm told it's the fashion. All young men call and bring you flowers after coming to your house. That's one of the first things I learnt on my return. Your drawing-room, I was told, was like the Chelsea Flower Show."

"And the real reason?"

"Well," he said again, coming nearer to her, "I saw those flowers in Solomon's window. You always liked roses. So I bought them. Then I had to bring them. And," with a broader smile, "here I am!"

"Well, you'd better sit down," she said, and walked to her desk and closed her blotter. "You'll stay to tea?"

"Love to," and he spread himself on the Italian sofa. "Where's Hugh?"

"Working."

Bertie adjusted his coat which had become caught up in the brocade of the sofa and said: "Fancy Hugh working!"

"He works hard," Barbara said.

"What's he doing?"

"He's in Fraser's Chambers, reading for the Bar. Attending weary lectures, too," she said, still toying with her hair. "He oughtn't to be in chambers really, as he's not called. But Fraser's an old friend."

"When will he be called?"

"Soon now."

"A budding barrister?"

"A budding K.C.," she answered, firmly.

The door opened and Bertram appeared.

"Don't worry to arrange the flowers. Just put them in water and bring them up here, Bertram. And Major Raynes will be staying to tea. That will be four."

"Very good, madam."

"Four?" Bertie said, as the door closed. "A bun fight?"

"No. Pat and your *dear* Sybil."

"You hate Sybil?"

"*Hate!* My dear Bertie, I get a bigger kick out of Sybil than anyone I know. She just adores Hugh so that she can't bear it."

"Sybil does?"

"Move up!"

"They didn't say they were coming to tea, at lunch," Bertie said, as he moved his legs.

"Nor did you."

"But about Sybil—you don't mean it?"

"About Hugh? Of course. London's worse than India, Bertie. They're all in love—in the wrong places."

"Do you mind?"

"Mind! Why should I? Hugh's mine."

"I know, but Sybil's—clever."

"Now that's interesting," she said. "You think Sybil's clever. How?" she asked, suddenly.

"Well," he said. "That's a bit difficult for a man to answer."

"Well, move up," Barbara said. Bertie moved still farther into his corner. Barbara curled herself comfortably into the other corner. "Why?" she asked, looking at him.

"Well—she just is."

"That isn't an answer."

"I can't think of a better."

"Oh," Barbara said. And then: "How funny!"

"What?"

"Well, I arrive and everyone's talking about Sybil. She's so clever. She's so witty. She's so—marvellous. Well, I like people like that, Bertie. So I cultivate her. But I find her so dismally shallow. I know exactly what she's going to say, long before she says it. I saw her fall for Hugh, and every move of her game was so obvious. She just makes me rather ashamed of my sex, that's all. But she amuses me—in a way—rather because of it. People are such fools," she added.

"Well, I should have called her clever," Bertie said. "She's different, anyhow."

"But there are thousands of people saying the same things as she does, in exactly the same way. When I arrived they all seemed to speak like Camilla. You don't know her yet, I expect, but you will. Camilla's just an affectation. Then, they all dropped their G's and became thoroughly ill-bred. This languid manner of Sybil's is new—that's all. It gives her longer to think, I expect."

"You're becoming a cynic, Barbara."

"It's just," she answered, "that I'm seeing through it all."

"You sound as if you hate it."

"What? Being home?"

"I've never heard you be unkind to a woman before," he said.

"But I'm not unkind. I merely hate pretence." Then, with a yawn, stifled with a tiny hand: "There's so much of it here, Bertie."

"You're sleepy?"

"Well, I didn't get much sleep last night."

"Have a snooze now."

"No, let's talk. You've lots to tell me. You must have."

"Nothing, Barbara. Nothing at all."

"After I left?"

"Absolutely nothing. The same old thing day after day."

"On the boat?" she asked, mischievously.

"Not a damn thing."

"Well," she said, "there's a way of putting it! The way men speak of women to-day. *Thing!* Really, Bertie!"

"It's true, my dear," he said, his hand reaching for hers. "There wasn't *one*. There never is now." And then: "It was damnably lonely after you left, Barbara."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"But it was. We all hated it. All the pep went out of everything. Rather like flat champagne."

"Fiddlesticks, again."

"Barbara," he said. "Don't take your hand away. Let me have it a moment."

"And why?"

"I want to look at something."

"If it's the ring—you can see it. A plain gold band is on that finger, too. Remember that, Bertie?"

She looked at him; he looked up at her.

"Of course," he said. And then: "Give it me."

"Well?" and her left hand was held up for inspection.

"That scar. It's still there," he said. "Do you remember?"

She drew her hand away quickly. "Pass the cigarettes," she said. "They're your side."

"A fall on a slippery rock. A cut finger, bandaged with a hurriedly torn handkerchief. Blood! Barbara's

blood! And then a walk up that path together—a full moon overhead." He looked at her.

"What fools we were!" she said, looking away.

"You think so—Barbara?"

For an answer she examined the small scar on her little finger.

"You look just the same," he said, presently.

Barbara looked at him then. Bertie Raynes was short and a little thick-set. His hair was fair, too, and it curled in stiff wayward curls which were heavily pomaded and brushed back from his temples. So even were those heavily coated waves that men thought that they must have been artificially acquired. But this had not been so. His moustache, on the other hand, was the result of careful trimming and the finished use of a curling iron. His face was fresh and pink, and there was a fullness about it. He looked well fed. He was infernally well dressed.

"You haven't altered, either," she said. "And will you please pass those cigarettes?"

"Sorry," and he obeyed. Then: "You're smoking a lot."

"Not many."

"How many?"

"Ten—fifteen maybe."

"Much too many. You shouldn't. It's bad for you."

"Don't be so damned protective, Bertie! It's good coming from you, anyway!"

She busied herself with her cigarette, in business-like fashion, and exhaled her first puff with the air of a woman who smoked because she enjoyed smoking.

"You're a little unkind sometimes, Barbara."

"It's rather necessary, sometimes, Bertie."

"But you and I . . ."

"Oh, I know." And then: "I think I always belonged to Hugh. He's the only man who's mattered. The rest . . ." She shrugged her shoulders.

"Unkind again—eh?" He reached once more for her hand which she drew away.

"Merely truthful," she answered. "I'm always that."

"You certainly are!"

Then he moved farther into his corner.

"It's better," she said, not looking at him. "Besides, I like you."

"And Hugh?" he asked.

"I adore him."

She said that simply; as if she were merely saying that the day was fine, and that the May sunshine was at that moment flooding her room.

"How long before he left—did you know?" he asked.

"Not long. But when I did know, I realized that I always had."

"Funny," he mused. "I was awfully surprised when I heard. Really. I should have thought it would have been Gerald before Hugh."

"Which shows your ignorance of my sex," she said.

"But Gerald's great fun. Rich, too. Women found him attractive—out there."

"But out there," she replied, "women did many curious things, Bertie."

"Yes," he said, a little sheepishly.

Suddenly: "Come on. Tell me more. How were the Bradfords when you left? And the Jevons? The Wrightsons? You've told me nothing."

He replied disinterestedly; Barbara, on the other hand, was alive; bursting in on his remarks with this and that. Questioning all the time. Interested vastly in all he told.

"You can find an interest in the dullest people," he said. "The Jevons were dull, let's face it."

"Because they didn't particularly care for the Military? That's so like you."

"No. Not that. But they were. Infernally dull."

"Until Betty turned you down," she said, "you found them thrilling. You were always there."

"Nonsense."

"I'm afraid I know you very well, Bertie," she said. And then: "What is this about your not going back?"

"I don't know," he said. "If I can't get the appointment I want—I'm going to send in my papers. Things are altering pretty much out there. It's not like it was. All the old people are gone, too. I'm beginning to feel that I'm wasting my time. I know I got my majority early, but

I can't face waiting to grow too old to do anything else."

"So what will you do?"

"Nothing," he said. "Retire—do nothing."

"God! How dreadful! And live where?"

"Nowhere. Travel about. Paris for a bit. I'm going over next week. I'll take a flat there, maybe. Then come backwards and forwards."

"How beautifully immoral, Bertie. It doesn't suit you. You ought to be Hugh's shape to do that. Tall, dark, handsome, intriguing. Wear black hats and opera cloaks. Be thoroughly artistic and elusive. You're too matter-of-fact and obvious," she added.

"Oh, hang it!" he said. "I mean to say . . ."

"You're a real 'shovel' man," she said.

"Here, do that again, Barbara."

"What?"

"That business with your hair. It's a long time since I saw you do that. That's how I used to picture you. Always getting hold of a straying piece of hair and twisting it in your fingers. Like this—look!"

He showed her her own little trick. "Like that," he said again.

"Do I? How irritating. I hate people who fidget."

"But I love what you do," he said. "It's funny how one's mind hinges on a thing. Whenever I wanted to see you—I always caught hold of that. I could always see you then."

"Now I shall always be self-conscious," she said.

"But surely you knew?"

"And if I had wanted to think of you, Bertie," she said, again with that mischievous smile, "I would have thought of a very ridiculous moustache and a large and beefy hand brushing it skywards."

"Ah, but that's part of its culture!" And then: "But —did you?"

"What?"

"Think of me?"

"Yes, and the Jevons, and the Wrightsons, and the Bradfords, too," she said. "Don't get sentimental, Bertie, because I hate it."

The door opened again; the grave Bertram:

"Miss Pakenham and Miss Loring, madam."

Both rose from the Italian sofa. Sybil entered the room first, her hand outstretched.

"Really, Bertie! This is most indecent," she drawled. She did nothing with that hand. Instead she embraced Barbara on both cheeks. "Darling," she said. "I feel we intrude."

"I asked you to come," was Barbara's reply. "Sit down. And Pat—be an angel and close that door. It wants a new latch. Unless Bertram slams it, it doesn't close properly."

Pat obeyed and came and sat beside Barbara on the fender stool.

"And Bertie," Sybil was saying, as she settled herself against the cushion that Barbara had just left, "isn't this a little intriguing? You didn't say you were coming here." She said that coyly; affectedly.

"Nor did you," was Bertie's reply.

"Now!" and she raised her long index finger, "That makes it more intriguing."

"Sybil," Barbara said, "let me disabuse your mind—once and for all. Bertie I've known for how long—four, five . . . ?"

"Six," Bertie said. "Six whole years."

"And after looking him over for nearly the whole of that time, I decided to marry Hugh. So that's that!"

"But I," Sybil said, "have known Bertie since he was a schoolboy. I'm afraid I know him better."

"Steady on," Pat laughed. "Bertie's a major, anyway. Take care of your age, Sybil!"

Sybil was arching her eyebrows. "I was only *three* when Bertie was at school," she said. "You women clutch so at a straw!"

"But Sybil, you were 'out' before the war," Pat said.

"Must you destroy every illusion? I was only *just* out. Really, Bertie, the young women of to-day are like a pack of wolves. You'll find them out," she added, looking at her face in the small hand-mirror that she had just taken from her bag.

Bertie returned to his old place on the sofa.

"But intriguing—the word you use so often, Sybil. That's rather descriptive. I'm intrigued by all women since I came back. They've advanced somehow."

"Degenerated," Barbara said.

"Not at all. I find them more companionable—more knowledgeable. They *know* so much more."

"All the things they shouldn't."

"No. Not altogether, Barbara. It's not entirely that."

"There you are!" Barbara said. "*Entirely*. It does enter in somewhere, then. You like women who'll talk filth with you. You like women who'll be indiscriminate. That's my point. We meet you on more level terms to-day. If I were a man I'd prefer the maidenly blushes to all that. It's too easy to-day."

Sybil put the mirror back into her bag.

"I don't know," she drawled. "It's rather fun meeting a man on level terms, Barbara. I prefer to fight—naked. The heavy petticoats of our youth were damnably in the way."

"Sybil!" Pat said.

"You sweet! You take me so literally. Isn't she sweet, Bertie?"

Pat studied her finger-nails; pink and beautifully kept. "Well, I'm on Barbara's side," she said.

"Of course! That's why you're both so divinely attractive. That's why men rave so about you both. That's why your bodies are so in demand. Men like me for my mind. I prefer that," she said.

"Hence your success," Barbara said and reached again for the cigarettes.

"And where's my darling Hugh?"

"Working," Barbara answered, for the second time that afternoon, and handed round the cigarettes in their cut-glass box.

"Will he be in soon?"

"About six. Won't you, Pat?"

"No thanks."

"He's the only man I know," Sybil said, "that I'd hate to be too natural with. He's so divinely old-fashioned. That mustn't be destroyed. I'd never spoil that."

"You're mixing your words," Barbara said. "You mean chivalrous."

A telephone bell rang downstairs. Barbara got up and listened by the door. "It's bound to be for me," she said. And then as Bertram's footsteps were heard coming up the stairs, she called: "Is that for me, Bertram?"

"Yes, madam—Mr. Marling."

"Shan't be a moment," and she was running down the stairs.

"Jove!" Bertie said. "She hasn't altered, has she? Still just a kid."

"Kid?—I suppose so," and Sybil smiled with all the wisdom of her years.

Barbara returned up the stairs, breathless.

"Damn!" she said. "Hugh isn't coming home to dinner. Fraser's taking him down to his place at Woking."

"But that's wonderful!" Bertie said.

"What is?"

"Why—then you can dine with me."

Barbara looked at him, but before answering, the front-door bell rang. She walked over to the window and looked out. "Oh, it's the O.C.," she said.

"Who?" from Sybil.

"My father-in-law."

"Is this where I sit on a tall chair?" Bertie asked.

"Good Lord, no! He's an angel." Barbara ran to the door. "O.C.!" Then she called down the stairs. "My *sweet*!"

A firm step on the stairs.

"*Darling!*" And she had both her arms around Marling's neck.

"Ah, my dear," he said. "Nice to see you. Just thought I'd call in."

"But the flowers!" Barbara said, looking at a small bunch in his hand.

"Saw them in the street, my dear. Thought you'd like them."

A small bunch of flowers was in his right hand.

"You know everybody?" Barbara asked, taking the

flowers from her father-in-law's hand. "Miss Pakenham, Miss Loring, Major Raynes."

"How do you do."

"Darling, *how* sweet of you!" and she was smelling the wilting blooms. "Ring the bell, Pat—there's an angel."

"Sit here, sir," Bertie said, getting up.

"No. No. Please," and Marling sat stiffly on a hard seat on the opposite side of the fireplace. "It's a pleasant day," he said.

"Entrancing," Sybil replied. "The Spring, Mr. Marling. One must return always to England for the Spring."

"You travel a great deal, then?"

"I adore it. But the war, you know, it upset one's plans so. Really, the nightmare of it remains with me still. My nerves, you know, were quite shattered—really shattered."

"Indeed? I am sorry. It was a bad time." And turning: "And how is Barbara?"

"Flourishing, O.C. We had a blind last night."

"Quite devastating, it was," Sybil said. "My head this morning!"

"A what, my dear?"

"A party."

Bertram entered with a large bowl of flowers.

"Ah, bring them here, Bertram. And put these in water, too, please."

Marling turned.

"I'm afraid," he said, a little uncomfortably, "my flowers are rather insignificant. Just saw them in the street, you know. Thought you'd like them."

"But they're lovely, O.C.," and in passing she kissed the top of his head. "Bless you."

"So you had a party last night?" and he seemed more contented.

"A corking affair, sir. Home with the milk."

"Late, eh?"

"Four-ish," from Sybil, whose mirror had been removed again from her bag, her lipstick now being applied. "A typical Marling party."

"Typical, eh?"

Barbara stood behind Marling's chair, her arms around

his neck. "Sybil just can't help it, O.C. Exaggeration is her strong suit. She ought to have been a fisherman."

"Fisherman, eh?" he laughed. "Tall stories. That's too bad!"

Bertram appeared with the tea.

"And those who want cold tea—hands up," Barbara said.

Bertie's hand rose.

"Have you a tonic water?" Sybil asked, screwing up her eyes as if looking far into the distance.

"Have we, Bertram?"

"I think there's a bottle or so left from last night, madam."

"Right. Gin and Tonic, Sybil? And you, Pat?"

"Tea, please."

"A whisky and soda, and a gin and tonic, please. And I'll drink—tea."

"Very good, madam."

Marling looked at Sybil and moved awkwardly in his chair. "Your nerves, I suppose," he asked.

Sybil laughed loudly.

"No," she said, finishing her laugh into a pocket handkerchief. "I just hate tea. How divine!" And she laughed again.

"I see," Marling said, as he rose to hand plates round.

"Allow me, sir," from Bertie. "This is my job. This is where I excel."

"You do, Bertie," Barbara said, handing him a cup. "The champion poodle-faker."

"I say, Barbara . . ."

"That's for Sybil," she said, intent on pouring milk into the next cup.

They sat again, plates balanced on their knees.

"The fact is, my dear," Marling said, presently, "I've just come from Fraser's Chambers. He's taking Hugh down to Woking for dinner. I thought, maybe, we could dine together. See a play, perhaps. We might take seats somewhere."

Barbara rose from the fender stool again, and fetched the cigarettes. "How sweet of you, O.C.," she said.

And then: "I'd have adored it. But Hugh rang me—and I've made other arrangements now."

"A pity," Marling said, and picked up his piece of cake.

Bertie looked over at Barbara. Sybil coughed unnecessarily. Pat put her cup back on to the table and walked thoughtfully to the window.

"It is, isn't it?" Barbara said. "I wish I'd known."

CHAPTER VIII

MARLING rang for his clerk.

"Benson," he said. "I shall be at Old Broad Street this afternoon. I don't think there's anything of importance to do here. Ring me there, if there is. I may not come back."

"Very good, sir."

"And get on, please, to Mr. Hugh and tell him that I couldn't get seats for the theatre he wanted, so we'll be dining quietly at home. A black tie, Benson."

"Very good, sir."

Marling rose from his desk and walked to the hat-stand. "Tell him I tried to get him on the telephone this morning, but he was not in."

"I will, sir."

Marling reached for his top-hat and picked up his malacca cane and gloves.

"Good day," he said. "I hope you'll find your daughter better."

"I trust I will, sir."

"We'll have to see about a little sea-air for her by and by. Nothing like it, Benson. Nothing like it. Margate, perhaps. That's the place for children. Doctors swear by it. Let me know when she can be moved."

"It really is most kind of you, sir."

"Nonsense. Nonsense."

Benson bowed, as he held open the door. Marling walked down the pile-carpeted stairs into the street. Then into St. James's Street and northwards to his club.

To-day was the day when he visited the offices of The Com-

bined Glass Manufactures Limited, where he signed many share certificates and attended to other matters of routine. There were four directors who volunteered for this work, the other two living in the provinces—one of them being Thomas Holbrook, who mostly spent his days at the works of his own undertaking, Holbrook, Fairfield & Co., of Bedford. Of these four, Sir John Bickworth, Herbert Newcomb, Basil Northcote and Christopher Marling had volunteered to act on the rota and to attend the offices at Old Broad Street, E.C., during the week that fell to their lot. So it came about that every fourth week Marling attended there on two afternoons and in conclave with the Company's secretary, Rudolph Bernher, signed the many documents that were placed before him.

This was the outcome of arrangement. Richard Mosenthal had many calls upon his time, The Watling Investment Trust being one of the most urgent. Although he acted wholeheartedly as Chairman to this Glass Combine, he found it impossible to deal with the many matters of detail that fell to him, or would fall to any normal member of that Board. Mosenthal, in common with so many foreigners, had a dislike for delegating too much authority to his employees. He regarded his whole staff as 'underlings.' People, who were prepared to spend their lives working for a salary, earned from him a supreme contempt. They did not exist in his calculations. They were just cogs in the wheel. Consequently, they were not people who could be trusted with important tasks. They lacked imagination, initiative, and a sense of responsibility. They could not, therefore, be permitted to act as nominees. Such small things as the signing of share certificates, therefore, fell to the lot of individual members of the Board and to these four members in particular.

Yet to Marling, the two afternoons he spent each month in journeying to the city, were afternoons of immense interest. He inquired into this; he inquired into that. He dropped into Mosenthal's room to become buoyed up with the magnetism of his chairman's personality. And usually he called afterwards at Greville's office and together they returned from the city to their club, where

they discussed the financial situation until it was time for Marling to return to Princes Gate. He found himself taking a greater interest in the Stock Markets. Until recently he had invested his savings only in Government or gilt-edged securities. Now he was buying tobacco shares, mining shares, oil shares and always a large holding of 'Combines' which, in consultation with Greville, were bought and sold with good effect. He found this Glass Combine of absorbing interest. He had visited all the factories, and shared, in common with Mosenthal, a supreme optimism for its future. "They'll touch ten before the year's out," seemed an almost foregone conclusion. They were now standing at $8\frac{1}{4}$.

On reaching his club and with a nod for Stevens, he proceeded to his usual table by the window. Then he ordered his lunch, which he did sparingly, his back to the window. Clements hobbled in, his latest touch of the gout hindering him considerably.

"May I sit here, Marling?" he said. "I've lunched already, but I've wanted a word with you for some time."

"Do, Clements. Do."

"These 'Combine' shares. What about them?" he asked, sitting down, his right leg giving him trouble and being kept outstretched as he sat.

"Well, they're getting a bit expensive," Marling said, good-humouredly.

"But I'm told they'll go much higher."

"Well, I can't see what will stop them, Clements."

"I hear Mosenthal's still buying? Is that true?"

"That I can hardly tell you," Marling answered.

"Quite," Clements said. "Shouldn't have asked, I suppose. But the fact is, I've a bit saved. Not much, you know. All I've got, anyhow. Greville always laughs at me for being satisfied with five per cent. He says nothing short of seven per cent suits him. And usually it's ten per cent. Now, if there's something to be made there, I'd like to get in."

"Well," Marling said, thoughtfully. "I hate to advise. It's not my business. I'm not a stockbroker."

"But you're on the Board. You're 'in the know.'"

"Ah, yes. But the Stock Market—that's a very different thing, Clements. You can control a business, but you can't control the Stock Markets. That is, if you're wanting a quick profit."

"Well," Clements said, shifting his leg with difficulty, "I'm told Mosenthal controls his own market pretty thoroughly."

"Nonsense," Marling said. "I've heard that story before. Don't believe it," and he went on with his lunch.

"But it's pretty rigged, that market, they tell me?"

"Rigged?" Marling said, looking up. "Absolute nonsense! If Mosenthal buys, it's because he believes in his business. I know Mosenthal." And then: "They'll always have a story for the man who's successful, Clements."

"That's rather what I wanted to know," Clements said, presently.

"Well, that's the truth, anyway. It's true that he has a very large holding. I tell you that only to impress upon you his faith in the Combine. He's full of it. Might add, too—so are we all."

"Things are going well—really well?"

"Yes," Marling answered. "Mosenthal's got the right idea. A wonderful fellow. One can't help admiring him. One may disagree with him sometimes, but he proves himself right so often that—well, one hesitates to disagree."

"So I'm told," Clements said, his arm on the table, his ear pressed forward as if to catch every word.

"Well," Clements said, presently, "I haven't much, you know. But it's worth thinking over. You've a large holding, haven't you? I mean, apart from your qualification shares? Perhaps I shouldn't ask that, either."

"Not at all," Marling answered. "Not at all. If you want to know—I do hold quite a number. I believe in them, Clements. Shouldn't be on the Board if I didn't."

"Then that's good enough for me," Clements answered. "Thank you very much. See you in the Smoking-room later?"

"No. I'm going to the city right away."

"Well—see you to-morrow, maybe." He rose with difficulty. "Many thanks, Marling."

"For what?" Marling smiled.

"They were eight and a quarter this morning, I believe?" Clements asked, returning.

"Yes. Eight and a quarter."

"A high price," Clements mused. "Anyhow, thanks very much." With that he hobbled out of the dining-room.

Marling finished his lunch, wiped his grey moustache with his table-napkin and walked to the desk. After paying his bill, he turned to find George Heppel in the queue behind him.

"Hello, Marling. You're looking well," he said.

"Yes. Feel well, too, Heppel. How are the pictures selling?"

"Not too badly. I'm expecting an American invasion this summer. They're my best buyers to-day."

"Ah yes—that's where the money is," Marling said.

"Wait for me," as Heppel paid his bill, "there's a good fellow."

"I'm off to the city. Haven't long."

"Well, I'm just coming." Then collecting his change, he took Marling's arm and they left the dining-room together. "Yes, business is brisker," he said. "Quite a lot of buying. I'm commissioned to find as many Rembrandts as I can lay my hands on. A curious commission. An old fellow down in South Wales who's made a bit. Wants to collect Rembrandts like old women collect Goss China."

"Yes, there's a lot of money been made," Marling agreed. "I only hope people don't lose their heads."

"Well—personally, I don't mind if they do!" Heppel laughed.

"Quite. Quite," Marling said. "Bad for the country, though. Pictures haven't much value in a slump."

"But we don't talk of slumps to-day, Marling. There never was a time like this."

"No," Marling agreed, "we're making up for lost time all right now."

"Coming into the Smoke-room? I'd like a word with you."

Marling looked at his watch. "I haven't long," he said. "Anything important?"

"Well, you were good enough to advise me on that case I had in Paris last year. There's another complication now. But if you're busy . . ."

"Oh, I'd like to hear it," Marling said. "I've just time."

Together they walked into the Smoke-room. Over the coffee and cigars Heppel explained his difficulty. Presently Marling rose from his chair.

"Well, let me know," he said. "As long as it wasn't sold as a Constable I don't see how you can be held responsible. Anyhow, there's so much fake in your business, Heppel. I'd be out of business in a week!"

"But you're a bit of a connoisseur, Marling."

"I'm in a wretched position," Marling smiled. "I know a little. In art—that's dangerous. You'll usually lose money then. Better to know nothing."

"Well, many thanks, old fellow. By the way, my daughter sees quite a lot of Barbara these days. They're on some Committee together for a ball at the Albert Hall."

"Ah yes—Barbara's hands are pretty full," Marling said.

"They seem to work her pretty hard, anyway," Heppel agreed. "It's a damned shame the way these dowagers use these kids."

"Charity, you know," Marling said. "Good work."

"I never go out without seeing her," Heppel went on. "Not that I go out as much as I did. I always see her at Claridge's on Sunday evenings. That's my night out. Plenty of room for dancing there."

"My dancing days are over," Marling laughed.

"But she's a remarkably attractive girl," Heppel said. "Wonder she hasn't been painted."

"She is being."

"Who's doing it?"

"David Keith—for the Academy next year."

"Well, she'll make a remarkably fine portrait. That is, if he can get her expression. She's so *alive*. Difficult to get, that—in repose."

"Well—we'll see," Marling said, looking at his watch again. "I shall be late. Have to hurry."

A mutual wave and he left the club. Outside, he called a taxi. The June sunshine streamed in through the opened roof. He remembered a day such as this a year ago when Hugh was returning from the war. How quickly that year had passed! Why, they had been married seven months now! . . . Seven months! . . . He began to wonder about that grandson. There was no sign of him yet. . . . *Growing up with your children.* Yes, that was the right idea. Good for Hugh! . . . A delicate matter to inquire about, but he'd like to hear soon about that grandson. . . . Seven months! . . . Yes, time was passing rapidly. . . . He hoped it wouldn't be long now.

And Barbara? Yes, she was certainly going the pace a bit. Whenever he called at Smith Square it was always full of people. And whenever he rang up in the evenings they were always out. But he would be having them to himself that evening. They would all sit round the table in his long dining-room. Hugh and he with their port—Barbara with her brandy. And they would talk like that until their cigars were finished. Then they would go upstairs to the drawing-room and there Barbara would play to them. He was glad that Barbara had insisted on this procedure. He liked the idea of the three of them sitting there—just as Hugh and he had done—and Effie had done for thirty years before that. . . . And his game of cribbage with Barbara in the drawing-room after the music was over. . . . Yes, he wished that those evenings with the two of them could happen more often. The children never seemed to have time.

Marling was a little apprehensive, too, about all this 'gadding about.' He heard of it on all sides. Of course, it was good for a young woman to have all these interests —especially when they were charitable ones. But it was a great strain on both of them, he felt. They were never restful—always here and there. And till all hours of the night. It must be costing a lot of money, too—all that entertaining. And £1,500 a year wasn't much in these days. Effie and he had married on far less than that. But things

were different to-day. Perhaps he ought to increase that allowance. . . . But then, of course Barbara was extravagant. "Whatever I had, O.C.," she had once said, "I'd spend. It just runs through my fingers—like that." And she had demonstrated her point with a movement of tiny fingers and a smile that defied reproval. What good then in giving them more—to run through those fingers? He felt angry at times when she appeared continually in a new frock. At first he had thought that they had belonged to her trousseau, but she had soon exploded that theory. "But O.C.—*darling!* That was last year. One can't wear that to-day. It's so old-fashioned." Old-fashioned! It had looked quite charming, he had thought. And then the day she had said: "But I must look nice, O.C., for Hugh's sake." . . .

Yes, there was a lot of truth in that. It gave him a feeling of comradeship. Were not both of them doing things—for Hugh? Yes, a popular wife was a great asset to a professional man. And she was certainly getting him into the limelight—and the limelight of the right kind. Yes, he ought to do them better, he supposed. They must be finding it difficult to do all the things they were doing on £1,500 a year. . . . He'd have a talk to Hugh.

'For Hugh's sake.' He was glad that she had said that. Hadn't he, too, taken things on for precisely the same reason? This 'Combine' Directorship, for example. At sixty-six most men were thinking of retiring. But already things were moving. An insurance company had approached him even now with the offer of a seat on their London Board. But he had refused that. He was angling for another Board. It was a larger company. And insurance work, at the Bar, was extremely lucrative. . . .

The taxi drew up outside Dorchester House. He paid it off and walked inside. . . . Yes, he would talk to Hugh after dinner.

The lift-man touched his hat and took Marling to the second floor. He went through the swing-doors. The telephone operator smiled at him in between putting plugs into their correct holes, and a constant fingering of switches.

"Mr. Mosenthal?" she asked, still working.

"If he's free. Otherwise I'll go through. Tell him I'm here, if you will."

The operator smiled.

"I will, Mr. Marling," she said, and was again immersed in her work.

Marling strode through the passage to the Board-room, his malacca cane in his right hand; his top-hat in his left. Rudolph Bernher rose from the end of the Board-room table.

"Good afternoon, sir," he said, bowing stiffly.

"Good afternoon, Bernher." Then, hanging his hat on the stand in the corner, "Much to do?"

"Very little to-day," Bernher answered. "There are only two things Mr. Mosenthal would like you to peruse. He's spoken to you about one of them, I think. Otherwise, there is nothing, sir."

"What are they?" Marling asked, returning to the table and taking the chair at the end. Sitting down he adjusted his stiff cuffs, pulling each of them so that about half an inch appeared below each sleeve.

"That contract for Hendersons."

"Ah, the new machinery?"

"Yes, sir. The contract's here. Mr. Mosenthal would like you to glance through it."

Marling picked up the contract, which lay on the top of the papers on the blotting-pad before him, adjusted his horn-rimmed spectacles and proceeded to read it through carefully. Bernher stood by, polishing the lenses of his very magnifying pince-nez with a pocket handkerchief. Presently Marling put down the paper he was reading and reached for the telephone on his right.

"Mr. Mosenthal," he said—and waited. Then: "That you, Mosenthal? Marling here. This letter to Hendersons. I think I'd put in a clause to the effect that we are compensated if the work is not completed to time. It will upset our estimates considerably if they're as late as they were last time. Serious, you know, if there was such a delay again. Can't hear you. What's that? No. No. That's not the point. Nothing unusual in that. In fact,

a most usual clause. Would have paid us well last time. Not at all. All right. I'll leave it till you come in."

Marling replaced the receiver, pushed the Henderson letter to his right and picked up the file which lay underneath.

"Mr. Mosenthal would like to discuss that with you," Bernher said. "It's rather confidential. It's the Jefferson case."

"Jefferson case?" Marling queried, opening the file.

"A member of the staff who was dismissed last year, and is now claiming heavy compensation."

"What's his claim?"

"Wrongful dismissal."

"And the amount?"

"Five thousand pounds."

"Five thousand pounds!" Marling turned in his chair. "What was his salary?"

"Ten pounds a week, sir."

"But this is absurd, Bernher! The value of a ten-year contract! The thing's preposterous!"

"On the face of it—it is," Bernher agreed with servility. "If I may use the word, sir—it amounts, in my judgment, to a most unpleasant form of blackmail. Mr. Mosenthal is anxious to have your opinion, sir."

"Give me the facts," Marling said, thoughtfully, leaning back in his chair.

"Jefferson used to be my assistant," Bernher began, replacing his pince-nez. "Before we took him over he belonged to Cohen's. A cashier, sir. They were not in a big way, as you know, and he became a general factotum there. They found him of great use. He almost ran the place. When we got busy here, Mr. Mosenthal told me to find myself a first-class man and to get him from one of our own companies. After careful selection, I chose Jefferson."

"And he turned out the wrong man?"

"He did, sir."

"Why was he dismissed?"

"Well, there was no definite charge, sir. He was just unsatisfactory. He couldn't get on with Mr. Mosenthal,

you know, either. The wrong temperament entirely: Argumentative. And that doesn't go down with our Chairman, sir."

"Insubordinate?"

"Mostly his manner, I should say," Bernher answered. "An unfortunate manner."

"Work all right?"

"Oh yes. Hardworking enough. But he didn't sort of fit in here."

"Incompatibility, eh? Just that?"

"That is the position—really."

"Was he on contract?"

"Three months' notice on either side."

"That means," Marling said, his finger-tips together, "that you paid him £125?"

"He wouldn't accept it," Bernher answered. "He lodged this claim instead."

Marling looked over the top of his glasses.

"I don't follow," he said.

"Well," Bernher continued. "While he was with us he carried out various more or less—well, matters of rather a delicate and confidential nature, you know. Mr. Mosenthal used him quite a lot at first. Rather an aggressive type was Mr. Jefferson; he usually got what he wanted. But as time went on, sir, he had ideas, too—and they didn't fit in with Mr. Mosenthal's. So, of course, Mr. Jefferson had to go."

"But on what grounds does he base his claim? Five thousand pounds is a lot of money."

"Well," Bernher said, "in the early days of the company there was great activity in our shares."

"There still is," Marling said.

"But when the Combine was really starting, sir, there was not sufficient confidence in them. London was buying, but the provinces were slow off the mark. Glasgow, for example, did not start buying until some time after. It takes a longer time to move those Northern brokers. So Jefferson was sent up," Bernher added.

"Sent up? For what?"

"Oh, to start the propaganda," Bernher answered.

"On ten pounds a week!"

"And expenses, of course."

"Expenses? Ordinary travelling expenses, you mean? That's a matter of course, surely. A man can't travel about on ten pounds a week."

"Well, perhaps it was more in the form of commission, sir."

Marling's brow puckered.

"I don't follow," he said again. "Commission—on what?"

Bernher shifted his position.

"Well, the shares were not £2 then. If the provinces began heavy buying, then the shares would automatically rise. His job was to influence the big brokers. If he was successful, Mr. Mosenthal proposed paying him commission in proportion to the results."

"This is most unusual, surely?" Marling said, fingering the file. "He was there, representing the company?"

"Well, hardly as a member of the firm," Bernher answered. "He had connections up there and he had spent his life in the glass business at Cohen's. That gave confidence. He was a good talker. That was his job. He stayed with his cousin who was a broker in Glasgow —and just went about. Yes, he talked very well. Perhaps a little too well," Bernher added.

"And was this er—commission arrangement in writing?"

"Oh no, sir."

"Then how was it arranged?"

"Mr. Mosenthal's word."

A pause. Then:

"I see, and was any er—commission paid to him?"

"Yes, sir."

"To what extent?"

"I have the actual figure if you'd like it," Bernher answered, moving as if to the door.

"Don't worry now," Marling said. "Roughly."

"About £2,000. Just over that."

"In how long?" Marling asked, after another pause.

"Less than a year. About ten months, I should say." Then: "Yes, just ten months."

"I see. Did that include his expenses?"

"No, sir. They were additional. This arrangement affected his results only."

"The price of the shares?" Marling asked, looking over the top of his spectacles again.

"It was not, of course, based on that, sir. It was based on the activity he could create."

"The same thing," Marling said, looking down again. And then: "How does this man consider he is entitled to a further £5,000?"

"On the continued success of his work up there, sir. Glasgow and, in fact, all the Provincial brokers are heavy buyers to-day."

"I see," Marling said and picked up the file again. "And nothing was in writing?"

"No, sir—nothing."

"He can prove the initial payments, of course? They were by cheque?"

"Oh yes."

"To what account?"

"Special Expenses."

The door opened and Mosenthal entered.

"Ah, Mr. Marling," he said, coming over to him, his hand outstretched. "The colour, it is always in your cheek, the clearness in your eye. I do not ask how you are. I know."

Marling rose and took the outstretched hand.

"This Jefferson case," he began, looking down at the file in front of him.

"Ah yes. We will discuss. And Mr. Bernher, will you be so good as to tell Miss Clifford that you will see Mr. Lewisohn. He is waiting outside now. I am at a meeting, you understand? My apologies to him. Get from him the particulars of his scheme and we will discuss it later."

"I wi sir," and Bernher retired. "And you will see him later—if necessary?"

"Yes, later—yes. But not now."

The door closed. Mosenthal dropped quickly into the chair by Marling's side.

"It is a stupid affair," he said, his chubby fingers reaching for the file. "The man—he take me for a fool!"

"One moment," Marling said. "Bernher has been giving me the rough details. I'd like you to tell me a little more. Frankly, I don't like the sound of it. Why hasn't he been sent about his business before?"

"It is a matter," Mosenthal replied, "to which I attach but little importance. But they write here in the file—ah, allow me—they write here the letters from the lawyers. To-day we received the second letter. It is here—the top one."

Marling saw that a much-nicotined index finger was pointing to the name of the Combine at the head of the letter. He read through the letter and then read it through again.

"I see," he said. And then: "Have the Company's lawyers seen this correspondence?"

"Ah no. I have not thought it a matter of importance at all. When the first letter came—I throw it aside. It is a try-on. But the letter get filed. You see it here."

"But the man hasn't a leg to stand on," Marling said, turning back to the first official communication from Jefferson's lawyers. "Why has not some action been taken?"

Mosenthal shrugged his shoulders.

"It is but a try-on, Mr. Marling. In my life there have been many people who have tried to do these things. Always I have killed their endeavours."

"Then why," Marling asked, "do you take notice of this case?"

"Ah, it is different. This man—he knew too much."

"About what?"

"Ah well," and Mosenthal shrugged his shoulders again. "He have the inside information into many things that we do, my friend. We do not wish the world to know these things."

Marling thought for a moment.

"This share-pushing business . . . ?" he began.

"Ah, that is a bad phrase, my friend," Mosenthal said, in mock alarm. "That is the wrong phrase altogether. . . ."

"But Mosenthal—if the secretary is right in what he says, this man's job seems to have been going round the country boosting the shares. Surely that's very unusual?"

"In my business," Mosenthal answered quickly, "one must have the propaganda. That is the important thing—the correct propaganda. When we wish to have the further issue, it is essential that the money is forthcoming. Otherwise, we cannot progress. The success of this combine depends on getting immediately the most up-to-date machinery, the most up-to-date organization. That, my friend, costs the money. The public subscribe to the Combine. It is their money that we must have to make the success. And so—well, we make the propaganda."

Marling's brow puckered once more.

"It seems most irregular," he said.

"But, my friend, it is but the usual procedure that I adopt. And my undertakings—they have always been successful. Otherwise I could not consider the propositions. It is but a form of advertising. In the papers you see the advertisements for the firms. 'Buy this,' they say. 'Buy that.' And we say, 'Buy Combines.' We know, too, that they are worth the money. And we get our business talked of. It is always in the public eye. Then, when we want our second issue, the public, they come in with renewed vigour. And we, with the fresh capital, can expand and expand. Ah, my friend, you are the lawyer. You do not, perhaps, see as we financiers see. But it is the common practice. Share pushing! Ah, that was the bad phrase!"

"Did you employ others—in this capacity?" Marling asked, ignoring the playful slap that had been given to his back.

"My friend," Mosenthal said, serious again. "Do you consider that I can run the many sides of this undertaking with only the aid of a man such as this Jefferson? A fellow who is so clumsy that I ask him to go? No, my friend. I use this man, and that man. Choosing always the right man. One man, he do this. One man, he do that."

"And Jefferson," Marling said, "was a bad choice?"

"Ah, he was the choice of Mr. Bernher." Again a shrug of the shoulders. "He begin well—yes. But he has not the big mind. He see only his own point of view. He cannot see ahead like I see."

"This is all the correspondence there is about this man?—this file?"

"Ah, I expect there are many files, Mr. Marling, that are affected by this man. His reports and those things. But when I sack him—he just go. There was nothing in writing, except the cheque that I order to be sent to him."

"And which he didn't accept?"

"That is the case," Mosenthal said.

"Well," Marling said, "if that is all, the man hasn't a leg to stand on, and I'd let him do his worst. It will never go to court. Hand it over to your lawyers to deal with."

"That I am not anxious to do," Mosenthal said, leaning forward on the table. "The case—if it proceeds—will be against the Combine. It is not good for the propaganda to have the linen washed in public. It is the bad thing."

"But what else do you propose to do?" Marling asked. "You can't meet this demand. It's preposterous. Besides, it lays you open to further attack. If you—in reply to two lawyer's letters—settle with this man, you establish a most dangerous precedent. You'll establish his right to his commission continuing. It really is a most unsatisfactory state of affairs."

"Unsatisfactory? Yes, it is more than that. But I know this man Jefferson. He will proceed with the case. That I know. He would injure me if he had the chance to do it. But for me—I care nothing. It is for the Combine that I think."

"But if nothing was wrong in what he did . . .?"

"Ah, it is not the question of the rightness of his actions. It is that we do not wish the people concerned to know of how we do these things. The brokers from the North would not care to know these things. They are not the mugs—no. They are not that. But to

expose the methods of our propaganda—well, it is the bad thing."

"But, my dear Mosenthal—there are but two alternatives," Marling said. "Possibly a third, in that you see the man personally. But as it's now in the hands of lawyers—that's difficult. No, hand it over to your own lawyers. Call his bluff. I don't know the firm myself, but I'll have inquiries made. If they're of any standing at all and they know the facts—they'll not handle the case."

"Ah, you think we can call his bluff then? There, my friend, you are wrong. The last interview I give to this man he become truculent. He threaten this and that. Now he is with Butterworths—one of the firms who do not come in the Combine. I do not like it."

"Well, the Company cannot meet such a claim, anyhow," Marling said. "That's quite out of the question, Mosenthal."

Mosenthal fingered the pen that lay by the side of the clean blotting-pad in front of him. "You think it out of the question," he asked, looking up, "when it affects the Combine so directly?"

"A thing is right or it is not," Marling answered. "This man isn't entitled to a penny, unless, of course, you made it clear to him that his commission would continue. How you based it, I don't follow. But unless he can produce witnesses to prove that you made that arrangement, there is no case to go to court."

"But, my friend, it can go to court in spite of that. And then the linen is washed for the world to see."

"But a man who earns £500 a year can't afford the luxuries of court cases," Marling said.

"But Butterworths can, my friend."

Marling looked up; his brow puckered again.

"You mean they would back him—why?"

"You do not know, perhaps, that Butterworths are no friends of ours. They try always to influence the others. No, they do not like the big Combine. They do not like it at all."

Marling rose from his chair and walked to the window; his frock-coat unbuttoned; his hands in his trouser pockets.

"I don't like it, either, Mosenthal," he said.

Mosenthal followed him.

"I thought perhaps," he said, "that you would have the solution. Of the law—I know nothing. That I leave to those who do. But—well, the case, it cannot go to the courts, I tell you. That is certain."

"Well, let them think you are going to fight it tooth and nail," Marling said.

Both stood silently by the same window, looking at the movement in the street below.

"Was there anything else?" Marling asked presently. "I think that clause in the Henderson contract is essential —by the way." And then: "The Meeting, when are you fixing that?"

"Ah, that can wait, Mr. Marling," Mosenthal answered. "There is no hurry. I would prefer to leave it as long as it is possible. Then we show the better results."

"Well," Marling said, "if there's nothing else . . ."

"Ah, you must go—yes? But you return again on Friday?"

Marling nodded and walked to the hat-stand. "Let me know if anything transpires, meantime," he said.

"I would not have worried you to come to-day," Mosenthal said, following him again. "But I thought I would like the word with you about this man Jefferson."

Bernher returned: a whispered conversation—

"Yes. Yes, I see. Then I will come," Mosenthal said. Then turning: "Mr. Lewisohn, I must go to see him. He has come from Belgium, Mr. Marling. He has a scheme for the big selling there. And then I see you on Friday? There will be much to do on Friday. You will be here late, I expect. Perhaps we dine together after? And your boy, how is he?"

"Capital," Marling said.

"Ah, then we must all get together one day soon and make the party. We will do that." Then with a quick smile he went hurriedly through the door at the end of the Board-room into his own office.

Bernher bowed stiffly and followed.

Marling walked back to the Board-room table and looked

through the file again. Then he made a note of the lawyer's name, put on his top-hat and left the room. With a nod for the telephone operator, he went thoughtfully through the swing-doors and down in the lift. . . . Then he turned left and walked in the direction of his wine merchants.

"I've some excellent sherry just arrived, Mr. Marling," one of the partners said, as he led him into his office at the back. "I want you to try a glass."

They sat together and sampled it. Presently Marling placed an order. "And I can do with another dozen of brandy," he said.

"The Napoleon?"

"Yes."

"That's getting a bit low," the man said. "Your son was in yesterday. He ordered another dozen, too."

"My son did! 'Pon my soul, I thought I'd stocked his cellar pretty well."

"You did, Mr. Marling," the man smiled. "Good stuff doesn't last long!"

"I see," Marling said, thoughtfully. And then: "And I want some more of that Hock, too. Six dozen."

"Very good, Mr. Marling."

Marling picked up his top-hat. "Good day," he said. "If that brandy's getting low—reserve me another dozen. You can deliver it when I want it."

Mutual bows and Marling was again in the street, walking towards Drapers Gardens. . . . Four dozen bottles of brandy in seven months. . . . That seemed heavy going to him. . . .

"Hello, Marling. Earlier than usual," Greville called, as he sat at his desk.

Marling closed the door behind him. "Yes," he said. "I am."

"What's the news of the big white chief?" Greville asked, still signing his letters.

"Mosenthal, you mean? All right, I think. Mind if I smoke?"

"Do. The cigarettes are in that box there."

"I'll smoke a cigar, if you don't mind."

"*Mind*, my dear fellow!" Greville laughed. "It looks infernally good to me! Does me a lot of good when my clients smoke cigars. So rich!"

Marling lighted his cigar. "How's the market to-night?" he asked.

"Eight and five-sixteenths they closed. Any news from Mosenthal?"

"No," Marling said. "No."

"Pretty quiet in that market to-day," Greville volunteered. "By the way, old Clements rang me up after lunch. Extraordinary thing. Gave me an order to buy 800. Didn't know he had as much."

"Eight hundred?" Marling queried. "That's nearly seven thousand pounds. At five per cent that's £350 a year."

"Plunging a bit, isn't he?" Greville asked, playfully.

"Yes," Marling answered thoughtfully. "He must be."

"Dining at the Club to-night?" Greville asked.

"No. Hugh and Barbara are dining."

More scratching of Greville's pen across countless Contract Notes.

Presently:

"Are you going to be late?" Marling asked. "I've a few things to do, if you are."

Greville looked at the clock on his desk. "I'll be an hour, I expect," he answered. "You're earlier than usual."

"Then I'll get along," Marling said. "They're up a sixteenth to-night, then?"

"Yes—not much movement. Oils went back quite a lot. I expected a slight reaction in 'Combines.' But they were firm, and moved a sixteenth before closing."

Marling rose from his chair.

"What do you make of Bernher?" he asked, his top-hat in his hand.

"Oh—pretty efficient. He's been with Mosenthal for some time. Since the beginning almost. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Just wondered. Can't understand these foreigners, anyway. Never know what they're thinking—or doing, for that matter."

"Are you up on Friday" Greville asked.

"Yes, I'll look in then."

"Righto."

Marling closed the door and walked out into Drapers Gardens.

No, he didn't like the look of things. . . . By the A.B.C. shop at the corner of Throgmorton Street he bought an evening paper. . . . And this brandy, too. . . . *Four dozen!* . . . It seemed impossible to have drunk so much. . . . By the Bank he found an empty taxi.

"Eighty-seven Princes Gate," he said, and climbed thoughtfully inside.

But he did not open that paper; it lay on the seat beside him as he drove home. And when he walked into his study that evening, he realized that he had left it there.

CHAPTER IX

"WE never see Gerald these days."

"Dear old Gerald!" Hugh answered, as he lay on the Italian sofa. "Yes, I wish he'd come up more often."

Barbara sat on the fender stool, her hands supporting her chin, the fingers of her right hand coiling a strand of flaxen hair.

"I miss the old devil."

Barbara turned. "So do I, Hugh. He sort of belongs to us—doesn't he?"

"Those large red ears!" Hugh said.

"And hands!" Barbara smiled.

"Yes, I miss the old devil," Hugh said again.

Barbara turned back again to the empty grate.

"I wish he wouldn't be so 'up-stage,'" she said.

"It's not that," Hugh explained. "He just hates—London."

"Let's ask him up, anyway. We can easily make room for him. He can sleep on the couch—if necessary."

"I've asked him. He'll never come. He talks of going to Morocco for the winter."

"The winter!" Barbara said, "that's so far away."

"Not awfully. It's September already."

"Well, let's ask him again," Barbara said, still looking into the empty grate. "*I'll* write."

"Yes—you write," Hugh said. "You can wheedle anybody."

Barbara's hand reached out and took Hugh's.

"Can I—darling?" she asked. "I wonder."

"Little Sweet!" he said, taking that hand in both of his.

"You know," Hugh said presently, "I've often wondered. . . ."

"What?" Barbara asked.

"If he loved you, too."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"I couldn't blame him."

For his answer, a pressure of cool fingers.

"I couldn't blame any man," he said.

"You're a darling," she answered, and again a pressure of those fingers.

"I couldn't, really," he added, twisting the wedding ring on her left hand.

"The way you love me, Hugh, is terribly sweet," she said. "It frightens me sometimes."

"Why, dear?"

"Because it's so—perfect. You give me everything I ask for. The smallest thing; the biggest thing. There are never any questions. You just—trust."

"But of course."

She sighed peacefully. "Yes—it's very sweet," she said. "This little band, Barbara—perhaps that's the answer."

"My wedding ring?"

"Ten months ago. It seems yesterday."

"Does it? I think it does for me, too."

"Our honeymoon. . . ."

"Divine, too," she said. "Paris, Cannes, Monte, Brioni, Venice. . . ."

"The Belton Hotel."

"Yes," she said thoughtfully. "We musn't forget that."

"I couldn't," Hugh said.

A pause.

"Such a babe," she smiled. "Such an adorable babe."

"I never liked that place before. Now—well, I can never pass it without—remembering."

"Can't you, Hugh?"

"No," he answered.

"And we told them we were going to Paris that night. Some of them sneaked off to Victoria to see us off. Poor fools! As if we should!"

"I know," Hugh said.

"You'll always be like that to me—an adorable babe. I've seen you in the morning, your ruffled head on the pillow. Your face all pink with health—just like a child's. You look so young then, Hughie. So divinely young. I've often kissed you as you lay like that."

"Have you?" Then, gripping that hand more tightly, "You darling!"

"You bring out all the best emotions in me, Hughie."

"Because I look young—like a child?"

"Maybe."

"You darling!"

Hugh continued to twist that ring. "Darling!" he said again.

"It's all rather fun."

"What?"

"Being married."

"It is," Hugh said. "It's a gamble, they say. But I never had to gamble—with you. I knew. I always knew."

"So did I," Barbara answered, still looking into the empty grate. "It could never have been anyone else."

"Not even—Gerald?"

"No," Barbara answered. "Not even Gerald."

"I'm glad," Hugh said. "But if it hadn't been me, I'd rather it had been Gerald than any other man in the world."

"Why?"

"Oh—well, Gerald's right fundamentally. Besides, he's one of us."

"The Three Musketeers?"

"Yes—the Three Musketeers. What fun those days were!"

"But I miss the sun," Barbara said. "It was always sunny there."

"But there's sun here."

"But the leaves are turning."

"A glorious time. Burnham Beeches looked too lovely last Sunday."

"Take me there next Sunday," she said. "I'll walk round."

"You hate walking—and you hate golf."

"But I love beech leaves—in the Autumn. They were one of my earliest recollections. There was a wood near our house. I used to be taken for walks there. Often I collected branches and brought them home. They lasted so long. Even when the snow was outside, my nursery was still golden red and brown."

"Someone must have glycerined them," Hugh said.

"How material of you, Hughie! I never thought of that. I just knew that—they were."

"That's rather the way you face life altogether, Sweet."

"Do I?"

"A little. It's rather manna from the skies—where you are concerned."

"That sounds as if I'm not appreciative."

"Oh no. Why should you worry over ways and means, anyhow? That's my job."

"The big strong man?"

"No. Merely the householder. He sees to the rent, the paying of the rates, the gas, the telephone, the electric light, and all the little essentials that you take as a matter of course. That's my job. You accept those as a matter of course. That's quite right."

"But am I unappreciative, Hughie—really unappreciative?"

"No, my sweet. Those are essentials. But sometimes. . . ."

"Well?"

"Well—sometimes you *are* a little . . ."

"What?"

"It's difficult, darling. It sounds so hard when one says it. I don't mean it that way."

"Well?" Barbara asked.

"I wonder sometimes," Hugh said, "whether you really appreciate the value of money. Not money, as such. Rather how hard it is to earn. Do you know, that if I'm lucky I'll earn £200 the first year I'm called. £200! We spent that on our honeymoon."

"Did we, Hugh?" she asked, unbelievingly. "How dreadful!"

"I wouldn't have cared," Hugh said, "if it had cost *ten* years' salary."

Again the pressure of those fingers.

"That's not the point," Hugh went on. "And yet it is—rather."

"Then I *am* extravagant?"

"A little," Hugh answered and with his left hand he smoothed down the stranded coil of hair.

"I take things very much for granted?"

"A little."

"Yes," Barbara said, presently, "I suppose I do."

"O.C.—for example."

Barbara turned again.

"Not with O.C.?" she said, her forehead puckered.

"Sometimes," he said.

Once more she turned to the empty grate.

"Dear O.C.!" she said. "I'd hate to hurt him."

"I'd rather you hurt me—than him," Hugh said.

"It's sweet—your relationship, Hughie. Terribly sweet."

"But O.C.'s a very sweet person," Hugh said.

"He adores you, Hugh."

"I adore him, Barbara."

"Of course—so you should."

"I know. And I do."

"So do I," Barbara said presently. After a pause: "I hope he's enjoying Scotland."

"Yes," Hugh said. "He loves the moors. Uncle Henry's got a better shoot this year, too."

"Bless him!"

"But we live on his money," Hugh pointed out. "He's earned every penny of it himself. I can never forget that."

"And do I?" Barbara asked.

"I hope you don't," Hugh said.

"I don't like the way you said that. It sounds as if I did. Do I?"

"Well—we're younger, Barbara. We live rather in a different age—a different world. It's so easy to take things as a matter of course. Especially when the O.C. just showers things on us. I wish he didn't do that. Our allowance, for example. That extra five hundred a year. It's devilish useful, of course. But I wish he hadn't done it."

"But he can afford it, Hugh."

"That's not the point, darling. And yet it rather demonstrates my point."

"Manna from Heaven?"

"In a way."

The night was warm and the windows were open. Across the Square someone was playing. A silence fell upon them. Presently the music stopped.

"How divinely that person plays," Barbara said. "I wish I knew who it was. It sounded as if it was coming to us over the water."

"Venice," Hugh said. "Do you remember Venice?"

Barbara turned. "Yes, Hughie—I do."

"And what you said that night? I wonder if you'll ever say that again?"

"About our baby?"

"Yes."

Again a return to the empty grate.

"You want a child awfully, don't you, Hugh?" she asked, after a pause.

"A son," Hugh answered. "That's what I want, Barbara. I want that desperately."

"But there's lot's of time," Barbara said, biting her pearls thoughtfully. "We're both very young."

"But think, Barbara!—a son who can grow up with us! Be a friend, and we'll both be friends of his. While we're both young enough to be—young."

"But we'll be young for years yet."

"Not young enough, Barbara," Hugh said.

Barbara continued to look into the empty grate, her necklace between her lips.

"But we *are* young, Hughie."

"I'm twenty-six," he said.

"I'm twenty-five. That isn't much."

"You'll be nearly fifty when he comes of age, Barbara."

"*He?* You always talk of it being a boy."

"One always talks of the things one wants, Barbara."

"You're so sure, Hughie. You're so sure about everything. And yet I rather like that. You're never in a muddle. You just *know*."

"I hope I know," he answered, smilingly.

Barbara turned completely and faced him.

"Darling Hugh," she said. "You know one thing. I love you more than I've loved any other man. That's before God. You've never bored me. The others have. I've never lost my respect for you—and I did for the others. But this child. . . ."

He looked into her eyes.

"Don't say," he said, "that you've changed your mind. Don't say that. Venice? God!——"

"I know," she said, looking at him.

"That couldn't have been play-acting, Barbara."

"It wasn't," she answered, looking at him squarely.

"Then what?" he asked, smoothing again that wisp of hair.

Barbara looked away for an instant.

"But there's so much to do here, Hughie. Every day there's something more to do. I couldn't do all that if I were having a baby."

"But that will always be, Barbara. They'll always need you."

"But when I'm older. . . ."

"They will still need you."

"But my figure, Hughie. Would you like that to be ruined? You've always loved my figure—my slimness."

"I'd love it more," he answered, "if I knew why it was."

Barbara withdrew the hand that had been held so long in his.

"I wonder?" she said. "It's such a long time. Many men can't stand it."

"What—the waiting?"

"The plain hideousness of it all. The lines on the face—the drawn expression—the sickness."

"I'd mind it only—for you," he said. "It's such a tremendous thing to ask."

"It isn't," she said. "Not if you love."

"And you do?"

"Terrifically, Hughie."

"Then why?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know," she said. "I can't sort of face it—yet."

Hugh reached for the cigarettes.

"All right," he said, slowly. "I see."

"You're angry?"

A pause.

"No."

"Disappointed?"

"A little."

"I'm sorry," she said, and took a cigarette, too, from the cut-glass box that Hugh had put on the fender stool beside her.

Presently:

"It's better to be truthful, isn't it?"

"Of course."

"I'd never lie to you, Hugh."

"I know you wouldn't."

"I want a son, too, you know. But not yet. You talk of youth. Of growing up with youth. But it's different for a man. He just goes about as usual and one day he wakes up to find a child on his pillow. It isn't like that for a woman. It's hell all the time, with particular hell at the end."

"I know," Hugh said. "I know."

"And all the world looks on—and gossips. At the first signs they begin their prattle. It's ghastly to be talked about—for that. Everybody looks at you as if you're an outcast. It's such a secret, that. It should

belong only to you and me, that secret. Yet all the world would delight in talking about it—talking about our child! Even before it came! Of how well I was carrying it. Whether it showed or not. I can't sort of face that yet, Hughie. It isn't the pain of it."

"I know you wouldn't funk that," Hugh said.

"And yet, I suppose I should." She spoke thoughtfully; as if she were imagining it all. "I hate pain," she added.

"We all do, darling."

"But I'd go through the pain of it all. I wouldn't mind that a bit. But there's something rather degrading about the *business* of it all. All those months. . . ."

"You couldn't face it?"

"I will one day," she answered, looking at him. "I promise that."

"Venice wasn't—all play-acting?"

"It has never been that, Hughie."

"I think I'd kill you—if it were," he said, looking at her earnestly.

"Don't, Hughie!"

"I would, Barbara," he said, leaning nearer. "I really would."

"Really, Hugh! I didn't know you could be so dramatic!"

"You've never known me in love till the last year," he answered. "Nor have I. But there are some things so sacred to me now that I'd hang for them. No one shall ever take those away from me," he said. "No one. If they did—well, I'd just go stark staring mad. . . ."

"Darling Hugh!" She laid her hand on his coat sleeve reprovingly. "I don't think I like you in that mood."

He looked at her; his set face turned slowly into a smile.

"I don't like myself either," he said. "Black thoughts—I hate black thoughts, Barbara."

"Then why have them, my sweet?"

"Kiss me!"

She flung herself suddenly on to the sofa beside him.

"You adorable babe!"

"You angel!" and Hugh took her quickly into his arms.

The piano across the Square was being played once more. Both looked up suddenly.

"Listen!" they said together.

"Our tune!"

"That really is Venice," Hugh said, thoughtfully. "We heard it there. Do you remember?"

"Yes," Barbara answered. "I do."

For a moment they were silent until the tune was finished. Then Hugh got up slowly from the sofa.

"Dear Venice!" he said.

"I'm rather a little beast, Hugh."

"Why?" he asked, turning.

"We've only made one rule so far. I've helped you to break that."

"What's that?"

"Debts."

"Oh well," he said, "we'll soon get out of those."

"They're mounting."

"But I'll be earning something soon. I'm being called in November."

"You never scold me."

"Why should I?"

"Most men would."

"But then most men aren't married to you."

"You darling!" she said. "You really are a darling, Hugh."

"I'm just a very ordinary man, Barbara, who's rather stupidly in love."

"I don't deserve it."

"You deserve the best that I can give—such as it is."

Suddenly:

"Hugh!"

"Yes?"

"I'm rather a disappointment in some ways, aren't I? I'm extravagant; I take things for granted; I'm casual sometimes—cruel, too. I say things that hurt—I know I do. And I won't have a child because I'm too vain. For that's the truth really. Let's face it. I'm too jolly

vain. I love my own body too much to let it be distorted and my face too well to let it be lined and haggard. But one day I shan't mind so much about that. Perhaps I'll even love the excuse of it. Yes, Hughie, I must be a disappointment. I'm a damned sight too feminine."

"Feminine?" Hugh mused. "Motherhood is surely the most feminine of all instincts."

"I'm afraid I didn't mean it that way." And then: "I wish I did."

"You never shirk the truth, anyway," Hugh said, with a crooked smile.

"That's the one rule I've kept," she answered. "I've never lied to you."

"No," he said.

"I haven't, Hugh. Not even a white one."

"I couldn't lie to you," he answered.

Hugh fingered the onyx ash-tray on the shelf. Barbara still lay on the sofa—just as Hugh had left her. Her arms were now outstretched.

"Let's make some more rules," she said presently. "Let's start to-night. Lying—we've both kept that one. Extravagance—well, I won't buy another thing without talking it over with you first. Do you hear that, Hugh?"

"Yes," he answered, smilingly.

"Well, that's a big rule, isn't it?"

"Tremendous," he said, still smiling.

"And the next?—Well, I'll always be most attentive to O.C. I'll never take things for granted. Never again."

"Good!" Hugh said.

"And I won't—what will the next one be, Sweet?"

"*You're* making them up," Hugh said.

"Oh, help me!"

"I'm content as it is," he answered.

"Now!" said Barbara, with index finger raised. "You've broken the first elementary rule. That must be a *white* lie, because it was meant to be kind. But it's a lie, all the same, because I'm terribly unsatisfactory, really. Aren't I?"

"You mean—about our son?"

Barbara nodded.

"But one day. . . ."
"Yes—one day."
"How soon?"
Barbara thought.
"Never ask me," she said presently. "It will just—happen."
Hugh looked at her.
"All right," he said. "That's my rule, then. I'll never mention it till you tell me."
"I shan't tell you," Barbara said, looking up at Hugh, too. "You'll know."
Then both looked away and there was a silence. The music across the Square began again.
"Damn that tune!" Hugh said, impatiently. "I wish they knew another!"
Barbara still lay on the couch, her hands now behind her head. "What's the time, Sweet?" she asked presently.
"Ten-fifteen."
"We ought to be dressing."
"Where are we going?"
"To the Beauchamps. Basil wants us to look in at his place after—if we can get away."
"Don't let's be too late."
"But Basil's parties are such fun."
"St. John's Wood's so far out—though."
"But the Sparkes give such grand parties, Hughie. I hate missing them. There's always someone amusing there. I've never been bored there—once."
"All right. Let's go and dress."
"Pull me up, Hughie."
Hugh took both her hands and pulled her gently until she was standing beside him.
"How lovely to be dining alone," he said. "I've loved it."
"So have I."
"Let's do it more often."
"I'm game," she smiled.
"I never get a chance of talking to you. You're always surrounded by thousands of men."
"Women don't give you the cold shoulder either,"

she said, fingering the top button of his coat, which was level with her chin.

"But there is only one woman, Barbara. . . ."

"It's lovely to know you *mean* that," she said.

"Little Barbara!"

"Big Hugh!"

Their lips met.

"You have the bath first. You take longer," he said.

"No, you've got to shave," she said.

"Must I?"

"Well, you bristle a bit."

Hugh felt his chin solemnly.

"If you insist," he said. "It's only for you, though."

Barbara felt that chin.

"Yes, I'd rather you did," she said. "It hurt me on the sofa—just now."

"Little Sweet!" he said. "I'm so sorry."

"Pain—I don't mind that," she said, looking up at him smilingly. "You know that. That is, if it's for you."

"If you were the most infernal devil in hell," he said, taking her face into both hands, "I'd love you just the same. I just couldn't help it."

"And that business about killing? How about that?" she smiled.

"I don't think," Hugh answered, "that I could harm even a hair of your head. It's too beautiful."

"Then," Barbara said, coyly, "you've lied again."

"A white lie," Hugh corrected, patting her cheek.

"Then go and bath, you Breaker of Rules! And hurry, too."

"Kiss me again."

A kiss, sudden and violent.

"Hurry, I said," Barbara repeated, presently.

Hugh walked to the door.

"All right, Sweet. And write to Gerald while I'm bathing."

Barbara walked back to the sofa.

"What shall I say?" she asked, giving a pat to a crumpled cushion.

"Oh—tell him to come whenever he likes. Tell him

there must be a meeting of the Three Musketeers soon, or otherwise there will be only Two for ever after."

"All right," Barbara said. "I will."

CHAPTER X

HUGH MARLING walked up and down Victoria Station. The Continental train was late.

"Porter!" he asked. "How late *is* this train?"

A porter stopped in his walk.

"The Boat Train?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Can't say exactly, sir. There's been a fog in the Channel. I'll find out if you like."

"I wish you would."

"Come this way, sir."

Hugh followed with difficulty, for there were many people waiting for that train.

"It left Folkestone an hour and a half late, sir," the porter said presently. "That means it ought to be here in about twenty minutes."

"Thank you," said Hugh, handing him a silver coin.

"Thank *you*, sir," the porter replied. "And a Merry Christmas."

"And to you," Hugh smiled, turning to walk back towards the correct platform.

It was cold. That raw coldness that only London can know. Hugh turned up the collar of his coat and stamped his feet as he walked. Twenty more minutes of this! . . .

"Can you tell me," asked a woman with a suitcase, "where I can get a room to-night? I've missed my train."

"Well," Hugh said, looking at her, "there are lots of places, I should think." Then he noticed her shabby clothes and the papier-mâché suitcase. He thought for a minute. "You want to stay near the station?" he asked.

"I don't want to miss another train," the woman answered.

"Of course." Then, looking round: "I believe there

are lots of small hotels through there. Wilton Road, I think it's called."

"Wilton Road? Not too expensive, are they?"

"I've no idea," Hugh replied. "I shouldn't think so, though."

"Thank you," said the woman. "I'll try there. Wilton Road?"

"Yes—through there."

The woman trundled on with her suitcase. Hugh watched her disappear. 'Poor devil!' he thought. Christmas Eve and she'd missed her train. She'd wake up next morning in a strange and bleak room. Horrible wallpaper and a dreadful chest of drawers which you could never open because the drawers stuck. And that would be her Christmas morning! How dreadful for some people! And a woman, too. . . . He would have liked to have given her something. Yet she didn't look the kind of woman who would accept money from a stranger. Yet he wished he had done that. She had seemed such a tragic figure. Her face—he remembered little of that. It had been grey and sad; that was all he knew. And there had seemed large dark rings under her eyes. And she would, at that moment, be trundling out of the station, her papier-mâché suitcase in her hand. Outside it was cold and bleak; the fog accompanied by a mist that was like the morning dew, because it covered everything with a blanket of wetness. . . . That black coat of hers, with the short shiny fur, would collect it. . . . He stood facing the arrival platform, and stamped his feet again. How ghastly, he thought.

There was activity on every side. Porters wheeled luggage here and there, followed by its owners. Whistles blew and people ran, bumped, apologized, and ran again. Hugh stood. . . . Twenty more minutes of this!

With his hands in the pockets of his coat, Hugh lived again the little scene that had taken place over their breakfast table a month ago. . . .

"Let's go to Paris for Christmas," Barbara was saying.

"We can't very well leave O.C."

"Why?"

"Well—it's usually a sort of family party at Christmas time. Uncle Henry and Aunt Margaret. Old Clements, usually, as he's a bit of a waif. My cousin. . . ."

"That dreadful cousin!"

"He is rather," Hugh laughed. "Isn't he?"

"Dreadful!" Barbara repeated.

"And we all spend it together. On Christmas Eve they all dine with us. On Christmas Day we all dine with Uncle Henry. But that's rather awful. He will fill his house with the most appalling snobs. But still," Hugh said. "It has to be done and I haven't done it for many years now."

"And must we do that every year of our married life?"

"Well, I don't know about that. Christmas means a lot to the old people."

"I thought," Barbara said, "that Christmas was the time for children."

"So it is. But the old people get the bigger kick."

"Well," Barbara said, presently, "that sounds a pretty grim way of spending Christmas, I must say."

"Not really. Anyhow, we owe something to age. In fact we owe everything."

"That," Barbara said, "is another dig at me, I suppose?"

"How?"

"Oh—this business about the O.C. keeping us. You will take things so dreadfully earnestly, Hugh. It isn't your fault that you're here, is it? You didn't ask to be born?"

"Of course not. That's not the point. . . ."

"It is," Barbara answered. "Of course it is. You're born, and your father happens to be Old Christopher. He's different, I admit. If your father had been Bertram, you'd have been a footman now, I suppose, and earning your own living. As it is, you *must* go to the Bar. Well——" Barbara shrugged her slim shoulders, "that's his look out. O.C. isn't the type who'd let you do anything that wasn't completely *comme il faut*. So there you are. I don't see the terrific need for all this gratitude. It suits his book, too."

"Barbara!" Hugh said. "I can't allow you to talk like that!" and he caught her wrist as she turned.

"You're hurting."

"I mean it. You'll not talk like that!"

"Oh—don't be so damned dramatic, Hugh!"

Slowly he let go that wrist and turned to the fireplace in their dining-room. The breakfast things were still on the table. Barbara took a cigarette from the silver box on the sideboard and lighted it. She threw the match on to a plate.

"All this tradition!" she said.

"Anyone would think you hadn't any," Hugh answered.

"I don't keep ramming it down everybody's throats, anyway."

"I'm sorry," Hugh said, later. "But we'll spend Christmas with O.C." He said that calmly; as if he were merely making a very ordinary remark.

"I see!" And then: "So I'm going to become a really family girl, then?"

"You're going to behave!"

"How dare you!"

Hugh turned slowly and faced her.

"I mean it," he said.

Barbara threw her newly lighted cigarette into the grate and walked over to him.

"Behave!"

"Yes, Barbara. I'll let you do anything, but you'll respect my father's wishes—sometimes."

"So I don't, then—often?"

"No," he answered, looking down at her.

Barbara looked up at him—her eyes glaring.

"Good Lord!" she said. "*You*—tell me to behave!"

"I'm afraid I do," he answered—"sometimes."

"And when, pray—have I—misbehaved?"

"Were you kind to him last night?" Hugh asked.

"About what?" she asked, insolently.

"Didn't O.C. want to play cribbage?"

"Well?"

"You know he loves it more than anything. And you know he loves playing it with you. What did you say?"

"I'm afraid," Barbara answered, "such details are too small to remember. I don't know what I said. I only know that I didn't want to play."

"Then I'll tell you," Hugh said.

"Oh please go on," Barbara answered, airily, walking back to take another cigarette from the silver box on the sideboard. "I'm sure you'll enjoy telling me."

Hugh watched her.

"It's hard to believe sometimes," he said, "that you are the same woman."

"That's a little involved," she said. "It wants explaining."

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Barbara."

"Well, suppose I do? What then? Do you want me always in the same sickly mood?"

"I insist on one thing, Barbara, and that is that you treat my father properly."

"Properly?"

"Kindly," he said.

Barbara paused, her hands on the back of a chair. "As a learned member of the Bar," she said, "that charge is rather vague. For God's sake, be definite, anyway!"

Hugh looked for a moment at the pattern of the rug in front of the fireplace. "You said to my father last night that you wished he wouldn't ask you to play cribbage. It bored you dreadfully."

"So it does."

"I see," Hugh said. "It never occurred to you, I suppose, that it gave him tremendous pleasure?"

"And it never occurred to him, I suppose, that I've played cribbage with him quite a dozen times since we were married—*loathing* it?"

"Is that so much to ask, then—a game of cribbage?"

"Taking your argument logically," Barbara went on, "I suppose you'll quickly seize your next point—is a game of cribbage every now and then worth £2,000 a year?"

"I don't see the need for flippancy."

"I don't see the need for rudeness," and Barbara flicked her ash into the same plate.

"Well, think it over," Hugh said. "The poor old chap was terribly upset. Didn't show it, of course, but he was. He'll never ask you to play again."

"Of course—I asked him not to."

Hugh looked up. "Really, Barbara!"

"Well?" and her head was thrown back as she gripped the back of that chair. "Do you expect me always to do things I don't like?"

"How often does *that* happen?"

"You know I wanted to go to the Calthorpes' party last night. But I couldn't. I had to go to O.C.'s instead."

"How often do we dine with him—anyway?"

"Quite often."

"Once a month—at the most."

"Well—that's pretty often. Do I ask you—or expect you—to dine with my family once a month?" Barbara asked, insolently.

"They're not in town," Hugh answered. "Besides, you're very pleased to go down there for week-ends in the summer."

"That's different."

"How?"

"Well, there's tennis. Besides, the garrison's fun, too."

"Full of young subalterns," Hugh said.

"Hugh, you're insufferable!" and Barbara walked to the window.

"I'm sorry, Barbara," Hugh said, presently "but that's the position, anyway. I'll let you do most things—whether I like them or not. But you'll be kind to my father. I insist on that."

"Oh—form a cribbage club, for all I care!"

Hugh left the dining-room then.

He was infuriated—absolutely infuriated. He had never quarrelled with Barbara before, although he had felt for a long time that he must put his foot down about her selfishness. He was not blinded by his love for her; he saw her faults. Many of those faults attracted him. They were but the actions of a naughty child—and those have a peculiar attraction of their own. But of late he had noticed her apparent rudeness to Old Christopher. He had noticed, too, the effect upon his father. There had been many such occasions and the refusal to play cribbage ever again with him had been the last straw.

He walked upstairs to his dressing-room.

He ought to have spoken to her about her remark at dinner the last time she had dined at Princes Gate. His

father didn't often tell jokes, but he had that night. *Of course* Hugh had heard it before! Everyone had. But there was no reason to be unkind about it.

"Sorry," Old Christopher had said, fingering his dessert plate nervously. "I ought to have known. I'd never heard it before. Thought it funny, you know."

Then the conversation had changed. As he had left that night, his father had taken him aside.

"I'm sorry, Hugh. That story, you know. I hope it wasn't in bad taste."

"Good Lord, no!"

"Barbara, you know—didn't seem to like it."

And then Barbara had arrived in the hall.

"I'm afraid, my dear," he had said, "that my story at dinner was in rather bad taste."

"Your story?" Barbara had queried, puzzled. And then: "Oh—*that*! I heard it in my cradle." Then she had pecked his cheek and they had left through the door that Jordon was holding open.

Yes . . . it was certainly time that he spoke to Barbara about these things. They couldn't go on. . . . And this Christmas. . . . Of course they must go. . . . There mightn't be many more for Old Christopher. . . .

Hugh picked up his note-case thoughtfully from his dressing-table, slipped his flat watch into his waistcoat pocket, the other end of his chain holding a gold match-box which he slipped into the other pocket. Then he turned and walked slowly downstairs. By the dining-room door he paused. . . . Usually Barbara was sweet in the early morning, clear-eyed and fresh; happy and encouraging. Asking always about this; or about that. His work, of how Fraser was—and was he pleased with Hugh? Little incidents that happened during his day seemed always of vital interest to her. And then that morning. . . . As if she couldn't *see* that she had been unkind!

He opened the door and looked in. Barbara still stood by the window, looking out into the Square.

"I'm going, Barbara," he said.

"I see."

Hugh stood awkwardly.

"Yes," he said, still standing by the door.

A silence.

"Why don't you go then?"

Hugh said, for nothing better to say:

"Because I want some cigarettes."

"They're on the sideboard," Barbara replied, still looking out of the window.

Hugh walked over and opened his own cigarette-case . . . but it was full already. He pretended to fill it all the same, in case Barbara should turn. Then he closed the silver cigarette-box with a snap and replaced his own case in his waistcoat pocket.

"Good-bye," he said, still waiting.

"Good-bye," Barbara answered, her back still towards him.

Hugh walked out of the dining-room then, and angrily out of his house.

Yes . . . that had been their first quarrel. How angry he had been, he thought, as he now stood facing the arrival platform, his hands still in his coat pockets, his collar turned up.

But like all quarrels, it had soon blown over.

"Hugh?" a little voice had asked on the telephone later on that morning.

"Yes."

A pause.

"It's—*me*."

Another pause. Hugh had cleared his throat.

"Well?" he asked.

"I'm sorry, Hugh," that little voice said. Its tone was so contrite.

"I'm sorry, too," he answered.

"Are you, Hugh? You needn't be, it's all my fault. I'm just a little beast."

"No," he said. "Of course not. Just thoughtless, dear."

"I'll try not to be," that voice continued. "I will, really." And then: "Hugh, are you awfully cross?"

"I was—a bit."

"You're not—now?"

"Well. . . ."

"Ah—*darling!*" came a whisper over the wires. "I do love you."

"Do you?" he whispered back.

"I don't know what made me say those things, Hughie. It isn't like me, is it?"

"No," he said.

"I think—I must be tired."

"I think—you must be."

"My nerves, Hughie. They're all wrong. I've been crying since you left. That's unlike me, too—isn't it?"

"Poor little Sweet," he murmured, getting closer to the telephone.

"I *am* tired, Hughie. I wish we could get away."

"So do I."

"Couldn't you—take me away—somewhere?"

"Where?" he asked, hugging the instrument almost.

"I wouldn't mind, darling. Anywhere—if you'd take me."

Hugh looked at the newly lighted fire in his chambers, which faced his desk.

"Somewhere warm," he said.

"Sun—yes, Hughie—where there's sun. I'm always happy there."

"Let's talk about it to-night."

"Couldn't we—meet before that?" asked that tiny little voice.

"At lunch?"

"Couldn't we?"

"All right," Hugh said. And then: "What fun!"

"What?"

"Lunching with you."

"You darling!" came a whisper. "Where?"

"Call for me at my chambers. I'm all alone here."

"At one?"

A pause.

"No," he smiled, "make it a quarter to."

And just as he was ringing off, that little voice had said: "Hugh, you didn't mean that—about the young subalterns, did you?"

Hugh laughed. "I did a bit," he said.

"Hugh!"

"Ah well!—don't be later than a quarter to, will you?"

"Why, dear?"

"Well," he whispered, "I'll tell you when you come."

But, of course, there had not been time enough to go far away. The sun would have been lovely, but it takes longer to get to the sun at this time of year—real sun where you can lie and burn your body brown. That was one of their greatest joys. But that would have to wait until the real summer came. . . .

So Hugh had said at lunch that day:

"Now look here, Barbara. You want to go to Paris. Why not go there *before* Christmas?"

"But that's a marvellous idea, Hugh! Then I can buy some new clothes!"

Hugh frowned mischievously.

"New clothes?" he asked.

"Well, darling—I haven't a thing to wear. I haven't really."

"Well," Hugh answered, jokingly, "that's dreadful! We'll have to see what we can do then. . . ."

"But it's true, Hughie. I've worn that black dress till it's almost become my trade-mark."

"We'll have to talk to the bank, then," Hugh laughed.

"No. *I'll* talk to them. The manager's a sweet man —and a bachelor."

"You'll wheedle?"

"Leave him to me!" was all Barbara had said.

Then their composure had been completely restored.

So they had gone to Paris—not to Bertie Raynes' flat as had been suggested, but to the Meurice. Bertie's flat was sumptuous to a degree. It was over a jeweller in the Champs Elysée. But it would have been awkward, Hugh had thought, staying in a man's flat for a whole fortnight. It was awfully good of Bertie to offer, but he'd rather stay at a hotel, if he didn't mind. After all, they would see lots of each other.

And they had.

Bertie knew Paris well and had taken them everywhere.

Montmartre was at its height and each night had merged well into the morning before they had fallen into their beds. But it had been fun—enormous fun. And Barbara was in her element. The air of Paris seemed to get into her blood. It seemed to intoxicate her; invigorate her. It seemed to give her an even added zest so that, to Hugh, she became completely irresistible. Barbara had never appeared so attractive to Hugh—so utterly wonderful. They did things, too, that they wondered at afterwards. Sometimes they found themselves walking through the streets, their hands linked in one another's.

Then Barbara would say:

"Hugh, look at us! What *will* people think?"

And Hugh would answer:

"I don't care. Do you?"

"No."

"Well—it's only 'us' then—and we don't mind. Come on! We're holding up the pavement."

Then they would walk on, hands still intertwined.

"Isn't Paris—fun, Hugh?"

"With you, it is," he answered. "Look out! Mind these damned taxis." Then with a quick look left and right they would both run across the street and be narrowly missed by every taxi within reach.

"Whew! That was a near one!"

And Bertie:

"You two kids will be the death of me. You can't afford not to look where you're going. It's too dangerous here."

"But we mind awfully, Bertie," Barbara had replied. "Come on!"

It was always 'Come on!' in Paris. They had not been still the entire time they were there. It was first at one place—'Come on!' That was Barbara's direction to go on to the next place. An hour or so there accompanied by cheap champagne—"Come on—let's try somewhere else! Where's a good place, Bertie?"

"The Chanticleer."

"Forward then, my little man!"

And Bertie, his opera hat on the back of his head, would

lead the way down the stairs where the taxi had been waiting—and would wait, until it had eventually dropped all of them at their respective addresses.

"You know," Hugh had said one morning, "I wish Bertie wouldn't be so generous. It's getting rather embarrassing."

"Oh– he's got plenty of money. Besides, he likes spending it."

"I'm sure. But that's not the point."

"Oh—don't worry about that. Wait till he comes back to London. We'll take him about then."

"We didn't get much chance last time," Hugh said.

"But Bertie's got much more money than we have. Besides, he's a bachelor. He's got to spend it on something. Why not on us?" And then she added: "He likes us."

"I'd like to pay for more of these parties," Hugh said thoughtfully, "but, you know, we really can't afford it."

"We're only young once, Hughie, though—and we're not often in Paris."

"I know. But if we only stayed in one place it wouldn't be so bad. It's this continual moving about. We have to pay each time and they rook you like blazes."

"Well, we haven't much longer," Barbara had sighed. "Don't let's spoil it. We can face bills when we get home."

But Hugh had not cared about it. Besides, it wasn't the kind of holiday that Barbara was needing. She needed rest. She could be doing all this at home. . . .

Then Pat had arrived with her mother. They had both been to Algiers and were spending a few days in Paris before returning home. So when the time had come for Hugh to return, Pat and Barbara had thought of an excellent idea. Barbara would stay on for a day or so and do the serious things that had not been possible during that hectic fortnight. Mrs. Loring would be delighted to look after her. She'd certainly keep an eye on Barbara, she said—"An eagle eye," she added, jokingly.

And so one bleak morning four days before, Hugh had driven up to the Gare du Nord, accompanied by Pat, Bertie and Barbara. The three of them had seen him into the train. They were all looking a little the

worse for wear; their last party had been more hectic than any of them. It had been six in the morning before Bertie had dropped them at the Meurice, and Hugh was catching the early train. . . .

"Good-bye, Hugh," Barbara said. "Miss me, won't you?"

"Lots!" he answered.

And Bertie:

"See you some time in the New Year, Hugh. I'm thinking of going to Kenya in the Spring, but I'll be over before then for a day or so, anyhow."

And Pat:

"I'll keep my eye on Barbara for you!"

"Thank you, Pat."

Then just as the train was leaving, Barbara had come close to the carriage window:

"Give my love to O.C.," she whispered, "and tell him how I'm looking forward to spending Christmas with him."

"Honest?" Hugh said.

"Yes—honest," Barbara answered, smiling.

Then the train had given its first jolt and with a hug and "Till Christmas Eve!" Barbara had jumped from the footboard and the train was moving.

"And don't be late!" Hugh had called, laughingly.

And of course, now she *was* late. . . . But then that was the wretched fog. . . .

Hugh turned and looked over at the clock. Another five minutes, if that porter was right. . . . His toes were frozen. He stamped his feet again and began walking up and down. . . . They'd have to be pretty quick over their changing. It wouldn't do to keep Old Christopher waiting. This annual Christmas Eve party at Princes Gate had been of long standing, and always they dined at nine o'clock on that night. This would be the first time that Hugh and Barbara had been present—as a married couple. . . . Last year, they'd been on their honeymoon. . . .

Porters were taking up their positions on the platform at given intervals. Hugh presented his platform ticket and went through the barrier. More walking up and

down; more stamping of feet. . . . A rumbling noise in the distance and an engine loomed into sight round the bend. Hugh found his heart beating more quickly. The train rumbled past, the windows of the carriages steamy and indistinct. The train drew to a standstill; pandemonium began.

Hugh walked quickly to the centre of the train.

There she was, just getting out!

"Hugh!"

He ran forward to greet her, taking her hurriedly into his arms.

"The most appalling journey I've ever known," Barbara said. "Those are mine, porter. There are two more in the corridor."

"Any big luggage?"

"Yes, one trunk."

Then she turned quickly to Hugh, who was watching two hat-boxes being handed out of the carriage.

Barbara looked, too.

"My dear—you never saw such bargains. I've had a *grand* time!"

"Good!" Hugh said, and watched the luggage piling up. Together they followed the porter to the guard's van. And presently another dreary wait while the trunk was being examined by the Customs.

"Anything to declare?"

Barbara produced some papers from her bag and explanations began; the trunk was then opened.

"I say, Barbara," Hugh said as they drove away. "Two hundred pounds on clothes. That's terrific!"

Barbara took his arm.

"It's no affair of yours, anyway," she said, sidling up to him. "*You* haven't got to pay for them." Then she looked up at him roguishly, her head on his shoulder.

"I don't follow," Hugh said.

"Well—I'll tell you a secret—shall I?"

"Do," Hugh said, puzzled.

"It's rather confidential," she cooed. "I oughtn't to tell you."

"Why?"

"Well, I was asked not to."

"Secrets?" Hugh said. "We don't have those."

"Well, before we left," Barbara said, nestling close, "O.C. had a talk to me about Christmas. He said would I rather have a present—or the money."

"And you said?"

"The money—of course."

"Barbara! You didn't!"

"Of course!"

"But, my dear. . . ."

"Well, I was only being truthful," she said.

"But, Barbara—he didn't give you all that? You didn't let him?"

"Yes," Barbara answered. "Was I wrong?"

"Wrong?" Hugh said. "Really, darling, I do think that's the limit!"

"But he wanted to give it to me."

"I know. But there are some things one oughtn't to accept. Two hundred pounds is a big present. A damned big present."

"But he can afford it, Hugh."

"Darling," Hugh answered. "Must I always explain things? It doesn't make any difference whether or not he, or anyone else, can afford it. It's just that there are some things one oughtn't to accept."

"But O.C.'s my father-in-law. There's nothing wrong in that, Hugh. I can't see it, anyway."

"Well," Hugh said, as the taxi drew up outside their house, "I wish you hadn't done it."

"Wait till you see what I've bought though!" Barbara answered and kissed him quickly before getting out.

Bertram helped the taxi-man with the luggage.

"We must fly," Hugh said, and immediately the house became alive.

Baths were turned on, luggage was being opened and tissue-paper strewn about the floor. Dresses were pulled out and flung on to the bed.

"I'll wear that one," Barbara said to Minnie, and ran quickly into the bathroom, her bedroom slippers clattering as she ran, her pink wrap pulled tightly around her.

They arrived at Princes Gate just in time. The Barlows were the first to arrive. Henry was pompous, as usual; Margaret was kind and motherly. Hugh's cousin Harold was pasty and tiresome. He always giggled after every remark and his teeth protruded and one of the front ones had been broken off sideways, which had always annoyed Barbara intensely. "He always seems to thrust it at you, too!" Barbara used to say. After the usual remarks, Clements hobbled in, grateful and polite. Then Mrs. Neilson who, whilst in London, was regarded as one of the family. Presently Jordon announced dinner.

They ate their turkey and drank their champagne. Old Christopher at his usual seat at the top of the table, talking politely to Mrs. Neilson on his right. The Christmas pudding, surrounded with a mass of flaming brandy, was carried in whilst the lights were lowered. The usual remarks were, of course, made. Then the lights were turned up again; toasts were drunk; crackers were pulled. Presently the women left them.

Hugh talked to Harold, who had now joined the staff of one of the foreign banks and was shortly being sent to America to complete his training. The older men talked mostly of finance and especially of 'Combines.'

"What do you think of them, Barlow?" Clements asked.

"Ask Christopher," Barlow answered. "He's a mine of information!"

"They're down a bit this week," Clements said, his left hand pressing his ear forward as he leaned on the table.

"Nothing much happens during Christmas week, Clements," Barlow said. "That's nothing."

"Yes—quite. I bought at eight and five-sixteenths, you know. I'm told they'll go to ten. I'm afraid I got in rather late. What do you think?"

"Well," Barlow answered, puffing his cigar. "There's no knowing with Industrials to-day. I think there'll be a settling down shortly. We haven't yet found our proper level. But it will soon come. Ten pounds is a big price, of course, but if you're locking them away. . . ."

"I'm afraid," Clements said, "that I am no gambler. During the war I put everything into War Loan. But I thought I might get a bigger return—for one needs it these days. Greville, you know, is most enthusiastic over this Glass Combine. And our friend Marling—if *he* buys —that's good enough for me."

"Hear that, Christopher?"

"I hope," Marling said, "that you didn't sell out your War Loan on my account?"

"Ah well," Clements replied. "I've followed your advice for many years, Marling. You've never been wrong yet. A great man, your father," he added, turning to Hugh.

Then they all left the dining-room.

"Ah—Hugh," Marling said, taking Hugh's arm as they went out. "Barbara seems to have enjoyed her holiday. Very glad. Hope she'll be better for it."

"Rather!" Hugh answered. And then, as he drew his father away from the others. "I say, Dad, I wish you hadn't done that—for Barbara."

"What's that, my boy?"

"Your cheque. I mean it's much too generous of you."

"Nonsense, boy. Nonsense."

"But two hundred pounds, Dad!"

"Two hundred pounds? Absurd!"

"But surely . . ."

"Nothing like it. The wrong end of the stick. What made you think that? I'd call that overdoing it, boy. Two hundred pounds!—'Pon my soul!"

"But didn't you?"

"Fifty, Hugh. That's all. Thought she'd like to spend it in Paris."

Hugh walked up the staircase with his father.

"It was damned good of you," he said presently.

Barbara was playing the piano when they arrived in the drawing-room. Harold stood by the piano moving his shoulders to the syncopation. Hugh talked to Mrs. Neilson. Henry Barlow insisted on singing to them.

"Remember this song, Christopher?" Henry called from the piano, holding up the copy of the song.

"I do," Marling replied. "I certainly do."

"I'd like to tell you, Mrs. Neilson," Henry said, "that in his young days Old Christopher used to sing, too. In fact, we used to sing duets together. It was fashionable then. I'm always asked to sing once a year. . . ."

"I didn't hear anyone ask you," Barbara smiled, taking the song from him and putting it on the rest before her.

"It's our custom," Henry Barlow said, bowing.

"I see," Barbara said, turning over the first leaf to see how it went.

Henry cleared his throat noisily. "Of course, I haven't sung for some time, you understand," he explained. Then with much aplomb he began his ballad in uncertain tones. The song was followed by polite applause.

Hugh continued to talk to Mrs. Neilson.

Then drinks arrived. Presently they were all walking downstairs. The Barlows insisted on dropping Barbara and Hugh.

"They're all rather darlings," Barbara said, as Hugh bolted the pillar-box red door. "I've quite enjoyed it—really."

"Good!" Hugh said and walked up to his dressing-room. Cardboard boxes were littered everywhere. Hugh looked at them as he took the flat watch from his waist-coat pocket. . . . Presently Barbara came in, her pink dressing-gown with the white fur trimming held tightly around her.

"Hughie," she said, her right arm around his neck. "Are you glad—that I've come back?"

"Of course."

"How small I am without my shoes—look!"

Hugh looked in the mirror that stood on his dressing-table. "Yes," he said, "you are rather a tiddler."

"Darling," Barbara said, "'Tiddler' isn't very pretty, is it?" and she nestled against him. And then: "Don't be long, will you?"

"No," Hugh said.

"And I'll have all those boxes cleared away to-morrow. I'm sorry to litter up your room."

"That's all right." Hugh was untying his tie. And then as Barbara was leaving the room:

"Barbara!"

"Yes?"

"Old Christopher says he only gave you fifty pounds."

"What?" Barbara asked, returning.

Hugh turned, and then turned again to the mirror.

"Fifty, he says. Not two hundred."

A pause.

"But I never said he gave me two hundred," Barbara replied.

"Didn't you? But those bills . . .?"

"Oh—the bills, yes."

"Well?" Hugh asked.

"Oh, I didn't say O.C. had given me the whole of it, Hughie. I said he'd given me a *cheque*."

"Then if it wasn't my money, as you say—where did it come from?"

Barbara seemed to be picking a piece of fluff from her dressing-gown.

"Oh," she said, "that's *all* my Christmas cheques put together. Daddy's and so on."

"I see," Hugh said, undoing his collar.

"You see, I thought it was better to spend them on clothes. That saves your pocket, doesn't it, dear?"

"Yes—I suppose so."

Then:

"You look so terribly solemn, Hughie."

"Do I?"

"And do you know it's Christmas morning now?"

"Is it?"

Silence for a moment. Then:

"Well—I'm going to bed. Don't be long."

The door closed. Hugh continued to undress, taking longer than was usual. . . .

CHAPTER XI

"I HOPE, sir, that your meeting will be successful," Benson said, holding open the door.

"Thank you, Benson," Marling replied, reaching for

his top-hat. "Just give my coat a pull down at the back, please."

Benson reached beneath Marling's overcoat and pulled gently at the frock-coat.

"Thank you," Marling said, and reached for his stick and gloves.

"You'll be back after lunch, sir?"

"Yes—about four."

Marling strode down the pile-carpeted stairs to the street. Benson returned to Marling's desk and collected some papers that were lying there, gave a poke to the fire and left the room.

Outside, Marling found a taxi.

"The Grand Hotel," he said, "Cannon Street."

It was February 1921. The winter had been a succession of frosts and damp, and Marling had succumbed to a severe chill which had confined him to his room for the greater part of January. Marling was seldom ill; consequently he was a bad invalid. The doctors strongly advised a visit to the South of France. He had narrowly missed pneumonia, they said. But Marling would have none of that. "I've had enough of this molly-coddling," he had said to Dr. Simpson, who had looked after his family for many years. "You've kept me in bed over three weeks. South of France! I've got work to do, my boy! Yours is the prescription for old women!"

"But Marling," Simpson had said, "you'll have to go slow for a bit. You're not as young as you were."

"We're all as young as we feel," Marling had laughed. "And I don't want any of your physic, either. My heart's sound. So are my lungs. . . ."

"But it was a near go, Marling."

Marling took Simpson's arm as he led him to the door.

"You're a good fellow," he said, "but you must allow me to know best. I've never played with my health. Never shall, either. It's your job to fuss—but it isn't necessary in my case."

"Well—keep wrapped up, anyhow. The weather's still treacherous. Another chill in your present state and I shouldn't like to say you'd shake it off so easily."

"All I want from you, Simpson," Marling had said, jokingly, "is your bill. That I'll pay gladly. So long, my boy. Many thanks. Nice of you to be so attentive. Appreciate it. I know all you doctors are kept busy these days, too. You've been very kind."

"Well," Simpson answered, picking up his small brown bag from the chair by the door, "we can't afford to lose some people, you know."

Marling patted him on the back.

"They call that a bedside manner," he laughed, "I don't need that any more! Nice of you, though, Simpson, nice of you. So long!"

The South of France! As if he had time to spare for those luxuries! As it was he had missed some important meetings in the Board-room at Old Broad Street. And he hadn't wanted to miss those. But Mosenthal had asked him to second the Resolution for the passing of the Report and Accounts at to-day's meeting of the shareholders. He felt extremely flattered by this invitation. After all, he was new to the Board. Sir John Bickworth should, in Marling's estimation, have seconded this Resolution. Yet he was proud that this task should have been allotted to him, although he felt nervous of the ordeal. Marling, unlike Henry Barlow, was a poor speaker. He found words difficult to find when standing on his feet before a large audience. And, of course, this meeting to-day would be filled to overflowing. The affairs of the Combined Glass Manufactures Limited were almost of national importance. Yes, he found it difficult enough to express himself in the ordinary way as it was. He was, too, if he owned to it, extremely nervous as he drove to Cannon Street that morning. But then, the meeting would be enthusiastic; that was something. He had helped Mosenthal considerably over his speech, which he was going to read. Marling only had to follow on after that, and by that time everybody would be in a good mood. Progress had undoubtedly been made. Remarkable progress, if one considered the age of the Company. And Hugh and Barbara would be there. Barbara owned five thousand ordinary shares in her marriage settlement.

That represented, on to-day's valuation, something like £45,000. Jove! he thought. Not three years ago those shares had been issued for £5,000. The thing was a romance; it was one of the biggest romances of the post-war period. Of course, no dividend had yet been paid on the ordinary shares, which Barbara held. He had been paying her £250 a year out of his own pocket. But for the first time in the Company's history, a dividend was to be declared to-day. The shares had touched eight and three-quarters in anticipation.

Frankly, he had been worried for some time over Barbara's marriage settlement. He, as a lawyer, had no right to put anything but gilt-edged securities into such a sacred trust. But he was so sure; everyone was so sure. Especially Mosenthal who, after all, owned over half the shares of the Company. If they went down—then he would be the heaviest loser of all. And Mosenthal was delirious almost, in his enthusiasm. As they had dined together last evening Mosenthal had said:

"My friend, to-morrow you will see! The papers they will acclaim our achievement. The evening papers they will be full of our results."

Marling had raised his glass.

"To your company," he had said.

"Ah—my friend. To *our* company—eh?"

They drank silently.

"To-morrow we will show them," Mosenthal had proceeded quickly. "We will show them who is right. The new machinery, it will revolutionize our industry. The market—we have won it already. It is ours, my friend!" Then with another shrug of his shoulders: "And there are still the people who think that I do not know!"

Yes, on the results, Mosenthal had certainly proved himself right. The factories were turning out their glass in large quantities. It was being produced cheaper and more efficiently. Individual factories had increased their turnover up to four hundred per cent. The whole industry was suddenly modernized. Their selling organization, too. Mosenthal had every reason to feel proud of himself; Marling had every reason to feel proud that he

occupied a seat on Mosenthal's Board. . . . Yes, this venture that he had launched into for the sake of Hugh's future had been a good investment. He had been offered that Insurance Board, too. The Shield Insurance Company Limited was one of the most powerful of the Tariff Companies, with a premium income of over two million pounds sterling. . . . Yes, he had every reason to feel satisfied with himself, as he drove to Cannon Street that morning. Hugh was at the Bar—his earliest ambition. Hugh was his friend—his fundamental ambition. And what good friends they were! And Barbara? Yes, they were friends, too. It was only this unbridgeable gulf that prevented them from becoming really intimate with one another. He still felt nervous when they were together—alone. She still spoke a different language and he could never talk that language with fluency. But still, Hugh and Barbara were happy. That was the main thing. Marling's practice was growing; his commercial value was rising. It needed only that grandson now to complete his picture. . . .

The taxi pulled up at the Grand Hotel, Cannon Street. Marling alighted and walked quickly up the steps.

"Will you put your hat and coat in there, Mr. Marling," an official said. "Mr. Mosenthal is waiting in the ante-room. That's the second door on the left."

Marling obeyed. People were arriving up those front steps in increasing numbers, presenting their credentials to the official who stood by the entrance to the Brunswick Rooms, where the meeting was to be held. Marling turned the china handle of the ante-room door and went inside. Holbrook was in deep conversation with Mosenthal, who was wearing the tail-coat that Christopher had last seen him wear at Hugh's wedding. He remembered that coat. Its waistline was too low. It gave the appearance of having been made for a larger man and having had only the tails cut when altered for the Chairman. A pity, Marling thought, as he entered the room. A man in Mosenthal's position, you know, ought to dress better. . . .

"Ah—Mr. Marling."

"Good morning, gentlemen," Marling said gravely.

Bernher whispered into Mosenthal's ear.

"I see," he said. "I do not think we need worry on that."

Marling fingered his stock; Bernher left the room again. Herbert Newcomb entered by the same door.

"Good morning," he said, "the room's filling up. Never saw such a crowd! Feeling better, Marling?"

"Much—thank you."

"Good!" Newcomb's broad figure was in front of the fireplace, his hands outstretched to the flames. "Thank God they thought to light a fire! Parky to-day, Marling. Not the sort of weather for you, is it?"

"I like it," Marling replied.

Mosenthal was still in earnest conversation with Holbrook, whose tall figure leant against the wall, his face greyer than usual, his hair noticeably thinner. Mosenthal stood before him emphasizing his point with a circular movement of his hands.

Sir John Bickworth, who sat with Marling on the Board of the Shield Insurance Company, entered, aquiline and cold; his thin nose white at the tip. He bowed to those who noticed his entrance, then he put his top-hat on to the table in the centre of the room. Wiping the end of his nose with his pocket-handkerchief, he walked over to Marling.

"Cold," he said, "extremely cold to-day," and rubbed his long thin fingers together.

The Company's solicitor arrived with Basil Northcote. Bernher followed them, walking quickly over to Mosenthal. Another whispered conversation.

"My friends," Mosenthal said, "they are ready! We will go." He walked mincingly to the door. "Mr. Bernher—my notes."

"Here, sir."

"Come—my friends," and Mosenthal walked through a door at the other end of the room. Marling fingered his stock again and followed through that door.

Clapping had begun before Marling reached the room. A green baize table stretched before him. He took a chair between Holbrook and Northcote on Mosenthal's

right and sat down. Then he looked up. . . . A sea of faces. Every chair in the room occupied and people standing in rows behind. . . . The small ovation that had been given to Mosenthal quickly died down. Every eye fixed upon Mosenthal; every ear alert.

Mosenthal rose; a sudden silence.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he said, amid a settling down of his audience. Like a born actor, he waited until all was attention once more. "The present meeting at which I have the privilege to preside is the third Ordinary General Meeting. I ask the Secretary to read the notice convening the meeting and the Auditors' report."

Then he sat down.

Rudolf Bernher rose and read quickly in an inaudible voice.

Mosenthal rose once more.

"I assume," he said, "that you agree that the report and accounts, which have been circulated to you, should be considered as read?"

More matters of form. A hubbub of whispered conversations again and a shuffling of papers and feet. Marling sat forward in his chair, his finger-tips together, his arms on the green baize table. . . . No, he couldn't see Hugh and Barbara.

A silence once more, electric in its suddenness. Mosenthal was standing, his notes before him. . . . His eagerly awaited statement was about to begin. . . . Black-coated men watched him; women scrutinized him. . . . This was the great Richard Mosenthal. . . .

"Ladies and Gentlemen," Mosenthal began, in a deliberate voice, "I explained to you at our last meeting that it was the decision of your Board to endeavour to recapture entirely this great market which in years gone by found its home in this country—a market that for many years before the war we had been gradually losing. It was the decision of your Board at that time, of which you showed your approval, that we should quickly take all possible steps to recapture this market —and I may add, our prestige, as world producers of this commodity. It is now my pleasure to tell you of the great strides we have made."

Mosenthal paused and reached for a tumbler, which he slowly filled with water. The slight pause in the procedure was the occasion for applause, which was quickly taken up throughout the room. Christopher Marling looked to his left and saw Mosenthal, the notes from which he was reading held in his left hand, standing there—apparently unmoved. In front of him a thousand people, for so Marling judged, alert and waiting. . . .

Mosenthal proceeded. He spoke of the need for the most up-to-date plant. Of how, with the exception of three factories, all their companies had now been converted to machinery. He proved conclusively the rightness of that move. He gave figures to show the increased production and its consequent effect upon price. He told of how their Export Trade had suddenly been born again. He painted his picture in more studied language than was his custom, since his speech was being read. He spoke with deep feeling on the question of safeguarding.

"We have been told by our politicians," he said, "that when hostilities ended, this country would be the home of the Englishman. We should be self-supporting, they said, and never again would we be subjected to the wholesale dumping of goods that was the cause of our decline before the war. On these assumptions, Gentlemen, we who control the Industries of this country have been led to believe that we shall be safeguarded—as other countries are safeguarded—against the competition of the foreigner." Mosenthal pointed with index-finger raised—and proceeded dramatically. "I wish to point out," he said, "that those pledges, given loosely though they may have been, *have got to be kept*. It is impossible to lay down a policy on that assumption, if, after the heavy expenditure to which every industry will subject itself in preparing for its campaign, we are to be told that once more the foreigner may dump his goods here."

Applause broke out once more, and was again quickly taken up. Marling noticed the men at the Press table pausing in their work.

"It is impossible for any business to be carried out on those lines," Mosenthal proceeded. "We cannot be

misled in this manner. It is not a matter of your pocket or my pocket. It is a matter that affects this country —and its great future. We, in the glass industry, employ many thousands of men. And the dependents of those men run into many times that figure. They depend for their livelihood upon the prosperity of our industry. The State itself benefits also by our prosperity. The issue is larger than that of the size of the dividend that will be paid to our shareholders. It is an issue of national importance. I have told you of the reorganization that has taken place in our factories and of the capital that has been expended in so doing. The capital sum involved is a large figure. Had we not been led to believe that we should be nursed—anyhow until we were properly on our feet again—we could not have considered such a vast expenditure. The co-operation of the Government of this country is, therefore, essential. The seriousness of what I am saying cannot be stressed too strongly. I say that I regard it as the duty of the Government of this country to see that we who, in common with other industries, are fighting to recover our position—industrially —are assisted in our task. Once we are established in our calling and strengthened by that nursing—*that* is the time that they should consider letting the foreigner enter once more. But if these pledges are not carried out, then the future of this country has but a poor horizon before it."

Mosenthal took a final drink from the tumbler at his side, and refilled it. Then he proceeded with his résumé of the Company's activities.

How much was being lost, Marling felt, by Mosenthal reading that speech. Words that he used seemed only—words. Had he been speaking as he did in his own Boardroom, the crowd would have been rising to him by now. His personality seemed cloaked by the reserve that the reading placed upon it. But he was holding them, still. Marling searched the sea of faces again . . . thoughtful, attentive, following every word. . . . But he couldn't see Hugh.

Presently he heard Mosenthal saying:

"I am now at the end of my explanations. You have heard of the difficulties with which we were faced when we commenced our policy—the policy that was decided upon at our last meeting. You have heard of how we overcame those difficulties, and of how by the decision of your Board we decided to go right ahead, taking every advantage of the situation created for us at the cessation of hostilities. So far the results have been more than satisfactory—they are beyond all our expectations. But we are faced to-day with a cloud that looms before us, driven there by our own Government. That cloud can be blown away if the Government chooses, and I say to them in all sincerity—with all my experience behind me—that that they must do, and do soon. They must clear the air for us so that we can see further and make our horizon—the entire world. Otherwise, we are cramped—and we return again to a position as third-class producers." There he paused; the most eagerly awaited news of all was now coming. People knew it and leant forward more attentively. Mosenthal's sense of the dramatic came to the fore. "Whilst your Board have to-day decided to pay the half-year's dividend on the First and Second preference shares," he said, deliberately, "and it would have been possible to pay a large dividend on the ordinary shares—*large*, I say—they have decided, nevertheless, to pay only seven per cent on the ordinary shares." Applause broke out immediately. Mosenthal raised his hand. "I make this statement publicly," he went on. "We are forced to take this precaution against the possible action of our Government." Then throwing the last typescript of his speech on to the table, he added with a shrug of his shoulders, "It is the funny situation, my friends."

Then picking up another sheet from the table in front of him, he read hurriedly. "I now beg to move that the report and accounts for the period ending December 31st, 1920, be, and are, hereby approved, and I will ask Mr. Christopher Marling to second the resolution, after which I shall be pleased to answer any questions which any shareholders may like to put to me."

Marling moistened his lips whilst the applause died down. He saw heads busily together, talking earnestly; then looking over at Mosenthal; hands pointing; a searching for figures in the copy of the Company's report on their laps; then showing something in it to their neighbour. A hubbub of conversation; a riot of nervous coughing that seemed to have been stored up during the silence that had accompanied Mosenthal's speech; a general movement of people in their chairs. Men at the Press table handed papers to messenger boys who departed hastily for Fleet Street. The room seemed full of smoke; the atmosphere suddenly heated. . . . Marling moistened his lips once more. In a moment now he would be on his feet addressing this large gathering. . . . He fingered his stock nervously. . . . He wondered where Hugh was sitting. . . .

Northcote, on his left, nudged him. He turned. Mosenthal was leaning forward in his chair at the centre of the table. Their eyes met; a nod; a hammer beat on the table; a sudden silence.

Marling rose. All eyes seemed upon him. He adjusted his frock-coat, looking round the room as he stood. . . .

"Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen," he said, his hands gripping the lapels of his coat. "I am sure that you have all listened to Mr. Mosenthal's report on the year's trading of your company with more than the usual interest. The policy that was laid down has been most ably carried out under his guidance and leadership. It was a fearless policy, but the correctness of his vision has been more than proved. For myself, I regard the future of this great Combine as larger than that of any industrial problem. The work that Mr. Mosenthal has set out to do affects this country as a whole. It is a noble work —noble because we are all fully aware that our Chairman has other interests that are as diverse as they are lucrative to him, personally. Yet he has given himself—I repeat —nobly, to the task of reconstructing this glass industry —to returning it to its flourishing condition of many years ago. We owe him a deep debt of gratitude." (Hear! Hear!)

"Our Chairman has spoken of the necessity for safeguarding our industry—giving it protection, anyhow, until it is once more on its feet. I am sure that every interested member of this Combine will share that view. In any case," Marling went on, through the chorus of Hear! Hears! "whether or not this protection is given to us, I, for one, still share with Mr. Mosenthal that optimism for the future of this Combine. Under his leadership, I feel sure that we cannot help but prosper. We have seen the results of his creative genius in other directions. We have seen what he has already done for the glass industry of this country. These are not the days for crying 'Stinking Fish,' Ladies and Gentlemen. These are days for clear-thinking and quick action. Both these necessary qualifications Mr. Mosenthal has, in abundance. We have shown excellent results already; we shall show better results next year when our factories are producing to capacity. We can, therefore, share that feeling of optimism which prevails everywhere to-day, with a greater feeling of security." Then a pause: "I have much pleasure in seconding this Resolution."

Then he sat down. . . . Ah! there was Hugh! . . . over in the corner there. . . .

"Well done!" Holbrook said. "Just right."

The applause died down.

Mosenthal rose.

"I will now answer any questions," he said.

A man leapt to his feet.

"Name?" someone called, behind Marling.

"Jefferson. J-E-F-F-E-R-S-O-N."

Marling looked up.

"That fellow used to be with us," Holbrook whispered. "Wonder what he wants. Didn't know he was a shareholder." He leant back in his chair and caught Dixon by the arm as he was crouching along behind their chairs.

"Dixon, how many shares has Jefferson got?"

"Five, sir," Dixon answered, and proceeded towards Bernher, whose assistant he was.

"Five," Holbrook mused. "What's he up to?"

Marling looked over at Jefferson, studying him closely. . . .

"There are one or two things I would like to ask," Jefferson began, holding a paper in his hand, his head thrown back. "The first is the consideration paid to the various companies that have been absorbed. Mr. Mosenthal, in his speech, has referred to the price paid for goodwill. May I ask how that was arrived at?"

A silence. Mosenthal made a note on the pad in front of him.

"I have various questions to ask," Jefferson went on. "Perhaps, for the convenience of the shareholders present, I could ask the Chairman to answer each question as I put it."

Christopher Marling leant forward again and studied this man. . . . A respectable-looking clerk, he thought.

Mosenthal rose.

"Certainly," he said, "if it is policy to answer them, then I will do so."

"It's a straightforward question," Jefferson said.

Mosenthal fingered the tumbler idly, his eyes on his questioner.

"The question of the consideration paid for goodwill was assessed according to its worth," he replied. "That is the obvious thing. We are all business men."

"On whose valuation?" Jefferson pressed.

Mosenthal shrugged his shoulders.

"A matter of arrangement," he replied. "A matter —quite naturally—of negotiation. I do not see the reason of that question."

"Will you tell me, then, what price was paid in this connection to a firm called Wrightson & Ball, recently absorbed by this Combine?"

Mosenthal paused.

"I do not see that it is policy to disclose these figures at this meeting," he replied. "What is the next question?"

The atmosphere seemed suddenly tense. People sat forward in their chairs, looking first at Mosenthal and then at his questioner. Christopher still leant forward, his eyes on Jefferson, who was glaring insolently across the room at Mosenthal.

"You refuse to give the actual figure?"

"I do—at this meeting."

"Very well!" Then turning: "You hear, Ladies and Gentlemen, what our Chairman says," Jefferson cried, addressing the assembly.

"Quite right," said a voice.

"Sit down!"

"I'll not sit down till I've had satisfaction!"

"Order, please—order!"

Mosenthal resumed his seat and sat back.

"Sit down, will you?"

"I ask our Chairman again—*will he give us that figure?*"

Mosenthal's face was a mask; it registered nothing.

"*Sit down!*" From various parts of the room.

Jefferson faced them.

"We have a right to know how our money is being spent," he shouted. "I, for one, am going to know!"

"Shut up! You've had your dividend," shouted another.

"Yes," Jefferson turned on him, "I have! That's not the point."

"What is, then?" asked another. "The Chairman's right."

"Mr. Chairman," Jefferson sneered. "I'll put my question another way, if you can't find it *convenient* to answer."

"Convenient!" someone said.

"Hurry up, then!" from the back of the hall.

Mosenthal still sat. . . .

"Is it true that when the question of goodwill was first discussed that that firm named a certain figure?"

Jefferson waited for his answer.

Mosenthal rose, smilingly.

"How could we discuss the business," he replied, "until we know how much they want? That is an impossibility."

"But they refused to come in, didn't they?" Jefferson snapped.

"It is true," Mosenthal answered, "that the firm you mention, owing to outside influence, were advised not to join the Combine. The outside influence, I would add," he said, pointedly, "are the people who work against us."

"But you got them in—*how?*"

Mosenthal shrugged his shoulders again.

"They come to their senses, I suppose," he answered, still smiling.

"To the tune of ten thousand pounds!" Then Jefferson turned to the people behind him. "Ten thousand pounds of our money was paid to this firm!" he shouted. "And six months ago they would have taken five and have been pleased to take it. Ten thousand pounds! That's five thousand pounds thrown away. Chucked away!"

"Well?" Mosenthal smiled. "What is the question about that? We have little time. At one o'clock we must leave this room and there is still business to do."

"My question is this—that this company is being grossly mismanaged. I repeat—grossly mismanaged."

"Oh—sit down!" someone called.

"A firm ask a certain figure," Jefferson shouted above the noise, "and instead of bargaining they are paid double. Is that good management, I ask you?"

Mosenthal still stood, a smirk on his face.

"If I must reply to you," he said, "it is only to say this: the condition of affairs in six months—it change very quickly in the present time. The shareholders of this company they have appointed their Board of Directors." A shrug of the shoulders. "It is for them to decide because they have the inside knowledge of the problems before them. It is true that we pay a bigger price to-day, but can you point out to me anything that has not appreciated in that time? I am afraid we must proceed with the business of the meeting." Then looking round the room, "There are other questions perhaps. . . ."

"I've not finished yet," Jefferson shouted.

People shrugged their shoulders, too, as if resigned to the man and his questions. . . . Better let him get them over. . . .

"Is that true?" Christopher whispered to Holbrook, his brow puckered—"I never heard of the first valuation."

"Nor I," Holbrook answered, leaning forward, too.

Mosenthal returned to his chair.

"My next question is regarding the new machinery,"

Jefferson said, more calmly. He referred then to the paper he carried. "Our Chairman has devoted a large portion of his speech to the laying down of new and expensive plant." Then he looked up. "Am I right in assuming that the order was placed with a firm called Henderson Brothers?"

Mosenthal looked at him and jumped quickly to his feet.

"I must take exception," he said, "to this specific mentioning of names! We have here the Press. Although I am sure they will respect the secrecy of these questions, I prefer that it should not happen."

"Hear! Hear!" from all sides.

"Well, that name's *out* now, anyway," Jefferson said. "But you don't deny that the contracts were given to them then?"

"Deny?" Mosenthal said, his bushy eyebrows raised.

"Yes—deny!" Jefferson scowled. "And you won't deny, either, that the price paid to Henderson Brothers was very considerably in excess of the highest tender you had received from elsewhere. Deny that!"

"Order—please!"

"Deny?" Mosenthal was smiling now. "No. I do not deny."

"And shall I tell you why Hendersons were given that contract! Shall I tell all these shareholders here—why? Shall I?" Jefferson's chin was stuck out menacingly.

"It seems that we have a shareholder here," Mosenthal said airily, "who, I am just informed, owns the large sum of five shares. Five shares! It is a big holding! And he tell us how to run this large undertaking! We will proceed with the next question—if you please."

"In one minute you will!" Jefferson called.

Mosenthal raised his hand, which immediately brought silence to the meeting. He waited until all was complete silence, then he said:

"It should not be necessary for me to explain my business in public. That I never do. That I shall never do. Neither do I take the occasion of the meeting of the Company to read a treatise on business management." He raised his hand to quell the laughter that followed

this remark. "Perhaps I should say that what I know I prefer to keep to myself—that is why I am successful!" Again his hand was raised. "But for the benefit," he said, "of this shareholder with the large holding, I will explain something to him. To be successful in business, it is necessary to have the best plant. In the same way it is necessary to have the most efficient staff. Perhaps our friend will appreciate that," he added, looking hard at Jefferson. "And I buy always of the best, whether it be plant or the people who work for our company. That is essential. Otherwise they go; I scrap them. I do not spend the money that all of you here have subscribed on useless things. So when I consider the most important move in the history of our company—I go naturally to the firm who make the best machinery."

Jefferson was on his feet still.

"The best!" he snapped. "You're a liar, Mr. Mosenthal!"

The man sitting next to Jefferson struck suddenly at that outstretched chin. In a moment the strained atmosphere snapped. Chairs were upset; those in the immediate vicinity rose quickly and tried to part them. Blows were struck on all sides. Mosenthal returned to his seat and watched, a smirk still on his face. . . .

"Good God!" Holbrook exclaimed. "Can't somebody get him out?"

Christopher Marling still sat, leaning forward on the green baize table. . . .

"Get out, you skunk!" somebody called when the men were parted.

Blood was on Jefferson's face, his collar broken.

"A liar, I said, Mosenthal, and a liar I repeat!" Someone tried to put a hand over his mouth.

Three men caught hold of Jefferson and dragged him from his seat. "Yes," he shouted again. "A bloody little liar!"

"Turn him out!" a voice shouted from the back, amid the commotion.

A woman fainted.

The three men struggled with him; others came to

their aid. Jefferson kicked to left and right. Two women went quickly to the aid of the fainting woman.

"Turn that brute out!" a woman screamed. "A woman's fainted here. Haven't any of you men got the guts?"

Other men forgot their respectability and grappled with Jefferson; chairs were now overturned—utter confusion.

Jefferson got free for an instant.

"You own the bloody business," he shouted. "Henderson Brothers are Richard Bloody Mosenthal—*that's* why they got the contract! That's how your money's being spent. You watch that little Jew. I know him. I know a lot more too. . . ."

A man had Jefferson's head under his arm; he was being carried out, kicking violently.

Marling looked down at the green baize on the table. . . .

"I think," someone said, getting up heatedly, "that we should immediately pass a vote of confidence in our Chairman and incidentally express our regret that he has been subjected to this most degrading experience."

"Hear! Hear!" from many sides.

"Believe me, sir—we have watched the manner in which you have built up this Combine with nothing short of amazement. You have given yourself wholeheartedly to the prosperity of the Company in which we are all financially interested. As such, we owe you a debt of gratitude. We know, too, that you, yourself, are a large shareholder. The future of the Company affects you—as it affects us. I am sure I speak for everyone in this room when I say that we have every confidence in your management."

Then he sat down.

"Hear! Hear!" Someone clapped; others followed.

"Your name?" asked a man behind Marling.

"Groves. G-R-O-V-E-S."

Mosenthal rose.

"I thank you, Mr. Groves," he said. "These things —they will happen. It is best to forget them. We will proceed perhaps now—with a little more—shall I say, dignity?"

"Hear! Hear!"

"There are perhaps some more questions?"

A man rose in the corner near Hugh.

"Name?"

"Brooks. B-R-O-O-K-S."

Mosenthal resumed his seat.

"I would like to ask one question which emanated from this rather unfortunate incident just now," he said. "Is it true that a contract of this magnitude has been given out at much higher cost to a company *owned* by the Chairman?"

He waited for his answer; Mosenthal rose again.

"I think," he said, "that I have answered that question already."

The fainting woman was being led from the room.

"It is true, then?" the wizened man in the corner pressed, "that you own that company—and they were given the contract at a much higher price?"

Mosenthal fingered the tumbler by his side.

"It is true," he answered, "that I have an interest in the company whose name has been mentioned." He shrugged his shoulders. "I have an interest in many such concerns," he added.

Peace was now restored to the meeting; that tense atmosphere returned.

"Would it be too delicate a question to ask whether all the members of your Board were aware of that when the contract was placed?" the man asked.

Mosenthal thought.

"I cannot tell you," he said. And then: "Yes—I expect they were. But I do not see the reason of this question. It is immaterial. . . ."

"Well," said the little man in the corner with the piping voice, "I think it has a great bearing."

"I will once more make it plain," Mosenthal said, strengthening his voice so that it carried to the farthest corner of the room, "that I do not consider that these matters relate to the business in hand. I have explained and I will explain again, that to succeed in our venture it is necessary to have the best plant and the best organization.

When it come to the machinery I go to the best manufacturers. The fact that I have a large interest in the shares of that undertaking should prove to you that I consider it the best firm to carry out this work." Again a shrug of his shoulders. "I must really express strong disapproval of the matters which have been brought up at this meeting to-day. They are most irregular."

The man with the piping voice was still on his feet.

"Then will you tell us, Mr. Chairman," he asked, "the difference involved between the accepted estimate and the other tenders?"

"I think your name was Mr. Banks. . . ."

"Brooks," the man corrected.

"Then I will request you, Mr. Brooks, to please cease asking the questions that for reasons that should be to you obvious, cannot be answered at this meeting. Your company has now the most up-to-date machinery, supplied by a firm who are the best. To succeed," he added, in a louder voice, accompanied by a banging of the table, "we must have the best, I tell you. And while I control this Combine they will always have the best. And now I will answer the questions of importance!"

He sat down quickly; Mr. Brooks sat down undecidedly. Whispered conversations began again.

"Did you know that?" Holbrook whispered.

"No," Marling answered, still looking at the green baize of the table.

"Did Mosenthal sign the contract?"

"No—I did."

Another man rose. Mosenthal answered his question. Then other questions followed. The business of the meeting eventually ended. The members of the Board rose from their chairs and filed out. . . . Marling noticed the small groups of shareholders collecting together. . . . He followed Northcote into the ante-room.

"This man Jefferson . . ." Newcomb began.

Mosenthal shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Marling," he said. "A minute, if you please."

He led Marling into the corner. The rest of the Board stood about, slightly ill at ease.

"I tell you," he said, gripping Marling's arm. "Did I not tell you? You say we do not meet his claim—and this is the result! It is bad, bad for the propaganda. But you say we must ignore such things. . . ."

"Submit to blackmail, Mosenthal—never!"

"It would have been the easy thing to settle with this man, I tell you. The five thousand we pay him—what is it to the damage he has done to-day? Ah—it is terrible!"

"How?" Marling asked, "if there is nothing wrong?"

Mosenthal gripped his arm more tightly and hissed almost into his ear.

"The papers, my friend! What will they say to-night! There is nothing—no—in what they will say. But how will it read in the papers? Our shares—they will react to this. Ah—it is the thousand pities!"

Bernher stood by.

"Mr. Mosenthal," he said, with servility.

A whispered conversation took place. Marling walked to the table in the centre of the room and picked out his top-hat from the others that stood there. The sergeant from the offices in Old Broad Street helped him on with his coat.

Marling stood. . . . Holbrook and Sir John Bickworth were talking earnestly together in the other corner. Newcomb and Northcote were in front of the fire.

Mosenthal turned quickly.

"I must go," he said. "I have important things to see to. Where is my hat, Mr. Bernher? Quickly, please. And Mr. Marling—I would like to see you this afternoon. About four, if you please. Good day, gentlemen. I am sorry to go so quick. I have the important message."

He was through the door before the others had noticed him, followed by Bernher. The others stood about, discussing this situation.

"Where's he gone?" Newcomb asked. "I thought we were all lunching together."

"I've no idea," Marling replied.

Marling, later, refused Sir John's invitation to lunch. With a "Good day, gentlemen," he walked through the door. As he went through the passage he saw groups of shareholders still standing in animated discussion. He

went down the steps and out into Cannon Street. There he crossed the road and walked slowly through St. Swithin's Lane. By the Bank he crossed again and down into Throgmorton Street . . . and Mosenthal *owned* Hendersons ! . . . He, Marling, had signed the contract. . . . He walked through into Drapers Gardens and into Greville's offices.

"Mr. Greville in?" he asked the boy.

"Don't think so, sir. I'll see."

Greville's secretary appeared; a plump person in a silk blouse; a pencil stuck in her hair.

"I'm afraid Mr. Greville's just gone out," she said.

"Any idea where? Will he be back before lunch?"

"I don't think so," the girl replied, leaning on the counter. "He had an urgent message from Mr. Bernher —Mr. Mosenthal's secretary—and he left at once for Old Broad Street."

"I see," Marling said.

"Can I give him any message, Mr. Marling?"

Marling paused.

"No," he answered, presently. "No."

Then he turned and walked out of the office. . . .

CHAPTER XII

MARLING returned from the city at five o'clock that evening. It was cold and bleak. The rawness of the cold penetrated his coat. As he left Dorchester House a newsboy stood before him. *Combines. Stormy meeting,'* he saw on the poster the boy carried. . . .

"Paper, sir?"

Marling handed the boy a copper and took the paper. He saw the headlines and a photograph of Mosenthal on the front page, by the light thrown from the lamp-post in the middle of the street.

He hailed the first taxi and drove to his offices in King Street. Benson met him at the top of the stairs.

"A little excitement to-day, sir," he said.

Benson followed Marling into his room and helped him off with his coat, which he hung up for him on the hat-stand.

"I suppose it was all organized—that trouble?" Benson asked.

"Hooliganism!" Marling said, and walked to his desk.

"Mr. Graham rang while you were out, sir."

"Leave me, Benson," Marling said, sharply.

Benson looked at his employer. He was already engrossed in his evening paper. Benson left the room silently.

Marling spread the paper on his desk. . . .

. . . A full report. . . . Verbatim . . . the full account of the fighting . . . the questions and the interpretations that lay behind them. . . .

Marling reached for the telephone.

"Put me on to Mr. Henry Barlow," he said to the girl. "If he's left, you'll find him at my club. Ring me when you've found him."

Then he replaced the receiver.

He turned the pages. There was an Editorial, too, in the Financial Section. . . . "God!" Marling muttered. . . . The shares, too, had dropped to seven and a half.

The telephone rang.

"Hello," he said.

"Mr. Barlow has left his office and he is not yet at his club," the girl said.

"Leave a message!"

Marling rose and paced the strip of Persian rug that lay in front of his desk.

This situation was worrying. Of course, Mosenthal was acting for the best—there was no question of that. . . . But it *looked* so infernally bad. Already the shares had reacted. . . . Confidence! . . . Yes, confidence was shaken temporarily. . . . Of course, it was only temporary. . . . And he, Christopher Marling, had signed that contract for Hendersons. . . . And he, Christopher Marling, had insisted upon not meeting Jefferson's demands. . . . Mosenthal was like a madman. . . . Yes, like a madman. . . . He'd never seen a man so completely lose his control.

"I'll break him, Marling," he had said that afternoon. "I'll bring him to the gutter. I have the power, I tell you, and I will do it. A man of so humble a birth and so poor

a mind—to do this! To have the *power* to do this! I'll break him, Marling. No more will he do these things. When I fight, my friend, I do not use the glove."

"Calm yourself!" Marling had said.

"Calm myself! Do you take me for an image? Calm! Have I not laboured to build this company to its present condition? Are not my ways always the right ways? And this man—he expose them—in the bad light. He pretend that there is the dirty business. I—Richard Mosenthal, connected with the dirty business!"

"It will all blow over," Marling had said. "The city will never lose confidence in *you*."

"Ah—that is so. But before I have finished with this man I will expose."

"What?"

"Oh—I know the things," Mosenthal said.

"Look here," Marling said, presently, "it's no good wreaking your vengeance on this wretched fellow. I expect he was put up to it, anyway. The only thing is to go on as usual, building up this great business. After all, what can affect the future of this Combine if it shows the results? Last year's trading was excellent. Next year will be better still. That's the only thing to worry about."

"I will break him, I tell you. In the gutter he will be!"

And then Mosenthal had turned in his walk.

"I am a fool," he said, "to listen to you. I speak to you as a lawyer. I tell you this man mean business. I tell you that, did I not? And you—the lawyer—tell me to ignore! Ah—but it make me *mad*! I value your judgment before. I ask you this and you are so sure. It is the first time, my friend, that I make the mistake. Next time I act alone—like I have always done."

"But blackmail, Mosenthal . . . !"

"Blackmail—what is that? Is not all big business the form of blackmail?" Mosenthal snapped.

"It wasn't," Marling said, thoughtfully.

"Wasn't—No! You English, you speak always with the proud voice. Your honour—yes, you live on that honour. And what happen, I ask you? What happen? You decline—and decline. It take the foreigner to come

to your country to show you. He is not filled with the ideas of the Middle Ages. He know that to exist among you—as a stranger—he must fight for his existence. That you English must learn, too."

Marling stood erect, his head held high.

"The English," he said, "will always fight—cleanly."

"Cleanly! Ah! And in the war did you fight with a musket and a cannon—like the days of Waterloo? Did you do that, I ask you? No, you use gas, I tell you. Gas that sneak over the grass like a snake and strike the enemy with a fang so deadly that he cannot breathe! Cleanly! You call that clean! If you had fought your last battles with the cannon and musket—what then? Already the Germans would be here. *Cleanly!* No, my friend, those days are gone. To-day we fight with every weapon at our disposal. Otherwise we lay ourselves open for the attack, because the other side will use the weapons not of yesterday, but of to-day, my friend." Mosenthal snapped his fingers in the air. "This method of *cleanliness*—look what it has done! You call it blackmail!" Then he had turned away quickly. "Blackmail! Ah—my friend, a bad thing has been done to-day."

Marling walked over to him as he sat now at the top of the Board-room table.

"I do not wish to talk more to-day," he said, huddled in his chair. "Already I am tired. I will speak to you on the telephone to-morrow afternoon after we have seen to what this '*cleanliness*' has brought us!"

"Good night," Marling had said, ill at ease.

But there had been no answer. Mosenthal had sat huddled in his chair, biting the nail of a much-nicotined finger. . . . Marling walked out of the Board-Room then. . . . And outside he had seen the evening papers. . . .

The telephone rang. He reached for it quickly.

"Hello!"

"I have rung up Mr. Barlow's house and I'm told that he will not be home till to-morrow. He has gone to Manchester for the night."

Marling replaced the receiver thoughtfully. He stood by the window. The lights in the offices across the road

blinking at him through the fine snow that was now falling. . . . Hugh? Yes, he'd talk to Hugh . . . a sensible boy, Hugh. . . . He had been at the meeting, too. He would be able to judge the effect of this Jefferson scene upon the people near him.

He walked back to the hat-stand and reached for his hat and coat. He put them on thoughtfully, turned out the electric light and left the room. He looked in at Benson's small office at the top of the stairs.

"I'm going," he said.

"Good night, sir," Benson answered, rising slightly in his chair.

Down the stairs and into the street. The snow was settling on the pavement. Thin though the layer was, it scrunched under his feet. He found a taxi with difficulty and drove to Smith Square. Hugh was alone.

"Barbara's out, Dad. She'll be in for dinner. Why not stay?"

"Nice of you, boy," he said. "I've some things to see to."

"A drink—then?"

"Perhaps a whisky, Hugh. I'm cold."

Hugh led him to the dining-room and poured him out a strong drink.

"Well, Hugh—and what do you make of things?"

"The meeting?"

"That fellow Jefferson."

"I must say it didn't sound too good on the face of things," Hugh said, pressing the soda syphon. "But of course, these big financiers . . ."

"That's it, Hugh. That's it."

"And those are the successful ones," Hugh said. "I don't suppose one can probe too deeply into the past of any successful man to-day."

"Of course, there's nothing wrong in this case," Marling said, quickly.

"Of course." And then: "I don't suppose old Mosenthal could be proved a crook. But I bet he's done some pretty queer things in his time, though."

"Would you blame him, Hugh—if he had?"

Hugh thought.

"No," he answered. "Not if he was successful—and hadn't harmed anybody."

"Wouldn't you?" Marling said, thoughtfully.

"Would you, then?" Hugh asked.

"I'm afraid I would," Marling replied, looking at the whisky in his glass.

"Dear old Dad! You're so frightfully old-fashioned!"

"Old-fashioned! Is that old-fashioned?"

"A bit," Hugh laughed.

Marling drank slowly.

"You know, Hugh," he said, "I feel old sometimes. Not in years, you know. I see things changing about me and I don't seem able to catch up with them. Life to-day is so different from when I was your age."

"Are we so different?" Hugh asked.

"Not you, boy—but—yes, the young generation have more advanced theories to-day. I can't understand most of them. The women, too. They don't seem to want to have babies, even."

"No," Hugh said, thoughtfully. "And yet I can see their point."

Marling looked suddenly into the fire.

"You can—Hugh?" he asked.

Hugh did not notice the pathos of the voice; the sudden gripping of his knee as his father sat in the chair that Hugh had placed for him by the fireside.

"After all, Dad—take Barbara. I can't help seeing her point."

"Yes," he said.

"I mean, it's a long time for an attractive girl. And Barbara's devilish attractive."

"She is, Hugh."

"Have another drink?"

"No, thank you."

"You'd better—it's cold outside."

"A small one then."

Some snow fell down the chimney and sizzled on the fire.

"It's a bad night," Hugh said.

"It's been a bad day, Hugh."

A silence.

"I wish you'd stay to dinner, Dad. Barbara would l ove to see you."

"No—boy. I'll get along. I must go now—anyhow."

"I'll ring for a taxi."

"Do."

Hugh handed him his second whisky and soda. He then rang up every rank in the neighbourhood. They were all empty.

"Now you'll have to stay!" Hugh said, laughingly.

"No, boy, no. I'll find one."

"You can't walk out in that!"

"I did before," Marling said, trying to emulate Hugh's smile.

"But it's coming down fast." Then looking out of the window: "I hope Barbara will be all right."

"Someone will bring her home, Hugh. Where is she?"

"At Sybil's—playing poker."

"I see." Then:

"Good-bye, Hugh."

"I'm sorry you'll miss Barbara," Hugh said.

"Yes."

They walked into the hall and Hugh went on in front to open the door.

"You're worrying over that meeting, Dad—I can see. Don't worry on that score. Why shouldn't he give the contract to his own firm, anyway? Don't we all look after our own? And if the plant *was* better."

"Quite, Hugh. Quite."

The door opened wider. A cold blast blew in. Some snowflakes settled on the distempered wall, making large round marks.

"Wrap up, Dad. Where's your umbrella?"

"I've got it, boy. Don't hang about—you'll catch cold."

"Good night."

A smile: "Good night."

The pillar-box red door closed behind him. Marling looked at the Square. He could not see across it for the sheet of falling snow. He buttoned up the collar of his overcoat, opened his umbrella, and turned to the left. He battled on, his umbrella in front of him, his teeth clenched. . . .

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER XIII

THE summer of 1921 was the hottest for a decade. Regulations came into force relating to the use of water; experiments were carried out to bring down the rain artificially. But it was of no avail. The grass, meantime, became yellow and scorched. The trees languished and no rustle was heard in their leaves. The dust rose in the streets and people who walked there became irritated —yet too languid to show their irritation.

Every possible precaution was taken against the outbreak of disease which the authorities feared; the newspapers were filled with summer diets and of how the populace should keep itself cool. Men fell dead in the streets from heatstroke; many who sought solace in the water were drowned. And on every side there was a deep brown—like the colour of earth. There was no green to be seen anywhere.

Barbara lay on the Italian sofa in her drawing-room; the long end was let down so that she could lie full length. Pat sat in the chair opposite, fanning herself gently with a copy of the *Bystander*.

"They're a long time," Barbara said. "And men say that we gossip!"

Pat smiled.

"Bertie's certainly full of his Kenya trip," she said. "I wonder if it's really as bad as that?"

"How?" Barbara asked.

"The women. I can't believe it somehow."

Barbara put both her hands behind her head as she lay on the brocaded pillow on the sofa.

"My dear," she said. "They're quite—awful! In India even, which, after all, is pretty respectable, they were almost as bad. It's the heat, I suppose."

"It's rather ghastly," Pat said.

"I don't know," Barbara sighed. "It's rather amusing—really. Put on the gramophone—there's a pet."

Pat rose and walked to the gramophone.

"What shall I put on?"

"'*Japanese Sandman.*'" And then she added, as one hand toyed with a strand of hair, "Heavenly tune!"

"I heard that first at the Chelsea Arts Ball on New Year's Eve," Pat said, as she searched for it amongst a pile of records. "You didn't go, did you?"

"I hate the Albert Hall," Barbara answered. "It's rather like spending Christmas with my in-laws. Beautifully Victorian and terribly cold."

"Cold?" Pat said, turning. "The O.C.?"

"Him?—No, he's all right. But the Barlows and the rest. Anyhow, put on '*Japanese Sandman.*' That's got some atmosphere about it."

"I'll never forget that night," Pat sighed, still searching. "Tony Blenkinsop proposed to me in one of the boxes."

"He would!"

"Why?"

"Did he lean out while he was doing it?"

Pat laughed.

"No—he took me to the back—in a corner."

"How unlike Tony! He usually needs an audience for the more important things of life. Otherwise he's just dumb—and rather boring. He's that, anyhow," she added, "if it comes to that."

"How you hate some people, Barbara!"

"No, I don't," Barbara said, slowly. "I just see through them. That's all. Haven't you found it yet?"

"You've got such a pile of them."

"But it ought to be on the top. I was playing it this afternoon."

"Well, someone's moved it then," Pat said firmly, turning. And then: "Are we going out to-night?"

"I suppose so."

"It's so hot."

"It's cooler to-night."

"Well, you come and bend down over these records! I'm all in a sticky mess from stooping!"

"We can go to some cool place," Barbara said, unmoved. "They always have the windows open at the Berkeley. It's cool enough there."

"Why not stay in?" Pat asked, finding the record and putting it on. "By the way, it was at the bottom—*not* at the top."

"Stay in?" Barbara queried. "What is there to do, if we do? Unless you want to listen to Bertie's flagrant affairs until the early hours. You don't even play poker, Pat."

"But we can talk. And you can play to us."

"How grim!"

"Of course, I don't mind," Pat said, turning the handle. "Only it's pleasant here—in this room. And restaurants are stifling this weather."

"We'll see what the men want to do," Barbara replied.

Pat put in a new needle and the gramophone was started. She leant against the piano, on which the gramophone stood; Barbara still lay, that strand of hair in her fingers. . . . The record ended.

"Put it on again," Barbara said, looking still at the ceiling.

Pat obeyed.

"Divine tune!" Barbara sighed, when it was finished for the second time.

The door opened.

"That tune!" Bertie said, coming into the room. "What does it remind you of, Barbara?"

"What do you think!" Barbara replied.

"Well—I should have said 'Paris,'" he said, going over to the cut-glass cigarette box on the shelf. "But knowing you, it might just as easily have been Timbuctoo!"

Barbara turned her head and looked at him.

"Is that so?" she said, and turned back again.

Hugh walked over to Pat.

"You're crazy about it, too, are you?" he asked, smiling. "The wretched thing must be worn out." Then he turned to Barbara. "Bertie wants to go out," he said. "How do you feel, Sweet?"

"Oh—I'm all right," she answered.

"I mean, you've not been awfully fit—and it's deucedly hot."

"No—I'm game," Barbara replied.

"And you, Pat?"

"Yes—I'd love to," Pat said, turning the record over slowly and playing the other side.

Bertie used the cut-glass bowl as a drum and beat his fingers to the syncopation.

"God! The music nowadays!" he said, when it was finished. "It gets better every year. Think of the stuff we had in the war! We used to think it was the goods then. But now . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. "Play the other side again."

"Not '*Japanese Sandman*'?" Pat protested, smilingly. "I don't think I could bear that!"

Hugh, who was still leaning against the piano, said:

"Well, what about it? If we're going, let's go now. It's after ten and I don't want to be late."

"Suits me," Bertie said.

Barbara rose from the Italian sofa.

"Come and powder your nose, Pat," she said, and the two women left the room.

When the door had closed, Hugh said:

"How do you think Barbara's looking?"

"A bit pale. All the women are over here. It's this infernal heat."

"She's never still," Hugh continued.

"She never was," Bertie said, exhaling noisily and flicking his ash into the grate behind him. "But she doesn't alter. She never looks a day older."

"No," Hugh said, and took a cigarette too.

A few moments later they were in a taxi bound for the Berkeley Hotel.

Ferraro gave them a window-seat and attended them in that charming manner which has made him the outstanding personality he is in London's restaurant life. The band at the end of the room was playing '*Avalon*.' A few couples were dancing; the remainder sat at their tables with iced drinks before them, or in buckets by their side. The electric fans whirred merrily.

"Barbara—let's dance," Bertie said.

Barbara put down her small bag, adjusted the belt of her white dress and, negotiating Hugh's knees, passed to the ball-room floor.

"How about it?" Hugh asked Pat.

"I'd love to, Hugh—but don't be polite, will you?"

"How?"

"Well, it's terribly hot and I know you've got a big day to-morrow."

"And how did you know that?" Hugh asked, moving smilingly towards her along the velvet seat.

"I remembered," she said.

Hugh looked at her.

"Pat," he said, "you're an extraordinary girl. Yes—you are a very extraordinary girl."

"Why?" she asked, taking the bubbles from her champagne.

"You never forget—anything."

Pat laughed.

"To-morrow *is* the big case, isn't it?" she asked.

Hugh nodded.

"You must be doing awfully well," Pat added, looking at him.

"Fraser's good to me, you mean," Hugh said, reaching across to take his own glass.

"You like it?" Pat asked, when he was seated again.

"I love it. I haven't had those weary years of waiting, you see. For my first year at the Bar, I've been really busy. But then, Old Christopher sends me quite a bit, too. I'm awfully lucky," he added, looking up.

"You're both lucky," Pat said. "I don't think I know two people who're luckier, anyway. That is, in everything. You and Barbara seem to have—everything."

"Yes," Hugh answered. "We have really." Then he looked at her with a crooked smile. "Why don't you marry, too, Pat?"

Pat fingered one of the shoulder-straps of her dress.

"I'm twenty-four," she said, thoughtfully. "Do you think I should? I mean—do you think I ought to be thinking about it?"

Hugh laughed.

"Really, Pat! The way you women approach it all!"

"Well," Pat said, her forehead wrinkled, "I've never particularly *wanted* to."

Hugh took the hand beside his on the table.

"I don't know why," he said, "but I always look on you as a child. You're only just over a year younger than me, too. But you never seem to grow up. All round one sees women like Sybil—women who are just too sophisticated to live. Perhaps even Barbara, and she's your age. But you—well, you're just like a very young sister to me. I always feel I ought to buy you chocolates when I take you out!" Then he added, "Do you mind?"

"No," she answered. "I don't mind, Hugh," and looked up at him, smiling, too.

"It's rather fun," he said. "I can be natural with you. If Sybil had come to-night I should have felt it incumbent upon me to have taken the floor with her before now."

"You wouldn't," Pat answered. "Sybil's too languid for words this weather. She'd just have—*sat!* Raising her lorgnettes would have been as much as Sybil could have managed to-night." And then: "Why must Sybil use lorgnettes?"

"Why do some women smoke?" Hugh answered. "They don't like it."

"*I* don't—particularly," Pat confessed.

"And you don't often, either," Hugh said. And then: "Yes, you are rather an extraordinary little person, Pat," and he looked at her again.

"Do you think you could get me a fan?" she asked.

Hugh signalled to a passing waiter and two fans were produced. Pat took one of them and fanned herself gently.

"I'd like a nice thunderstorm," she said. "I'd like the heavenly breeze that comes first. And then the lovely smell that comes from damp pavements after they've been dry for so long." Then she sat thoughtful for a moment. "Or I'd like a large and fast car and I'd like to drive into the country without any coat and the windscreen down so that the full blast came on my face. I'd like to motor

where there are trees on either side and where sometimes their branches met overhead forming an archway and the headlights made them look like fairy caves. You know how I mean?"

"I do," Hugh answered, still looking at her.

"And then I'd like to go on and on till we came to the sea. And then we'd bathe and make phosphorescent lights in the water and scramble about on the beach for our clothes. . . ."

"Oh, I see. We'd change on the beach then?"

"Well—no one could see, Hugh. It'd be quite decent!"

"I see. And then?"

"Well—I suppose we'd come home."

"But you'd be cold after your bathe."

"But we'd stop for coffee somewhere! There are lots of places we could stop at."

"But they'd be in bed and asleep."

"Well—we'd wake them up," Pat said. "They wouldn't mind that. It's too hot to sleep, anyway."

"I see," Hugh said. "And that's Pat's idea of spending a summer's evening?"

"It is—rather," she answered.

"It's mine, too," Hugh said. "On a night like this." And then: "I can't stand this going about night after night, really."

"Can't stand . . .?" Pat looked up.

"Well," Hugh said, "I didn't mean that, really. What I mean is—not these very hot nights."

"Then why do you, Hugh?"

"Barbara enjoys it," he said. "She adores going out. She loves seeing people, you know—loves being 'in the swim.'"

"I know," Pat said. "Look at her now. She's very lovely, Hugh. You ought to be very proud of her."

"I am."

"Look how everyone is watching her."

"I know."

"Bertie's too short for her. She looks best when you're dancing with her."

"I'm glad," Hugh said.

"Go on with what you were saying," Pat said, her eyes returning.

"Let's see, at that moment it was—er—going out at night."

"Yes—why don't you try leading a quieter life? It can't be good for your work."

"I'm pretty fit. Barbara and I ride most mornings."

"But sleep's so important," Pat said earnestly.

"I don't need much of that. No, I'm all right. Here, your glass is empty."

Hugh refilled it, under protest.

The melodies of '*Avalon*' ended. The dancers returned to their tables. Hugh stayed where he was, Barbara taking his old seat beside him.

"Hot?" Hugh asked, handing Barbara a fan.

"A bit," Barbara answered, opening it and fanning herself. "Bertie's hungry. Will you order?"

The business of food over and Pat refusing to eat anything, Bertie rose and walked over to Pat.

"Let's dance," he said. "There's nothing like it for losing weight."

"But I don't want to lose weight," she laughed.

"Well—it's good for the complexion, anyway—a good sweat."

"Bertie!—I hate that word," Barbara said.

"I've heard you use worse," he answered. "Come on, Pat."

"Why aren't you dancing?" Barbara asked Hugh, when they were alone.

"I will, presently."

"You're such a damper, Hugh. You just sit about as if you hated it all." And then she powdered her nose. "You're getting so set," she added.

Hugh took her arm.

"And please don't do that! It's hot enough already."

"Sorry, Sweet," Hugh said apologetically, his hand fingering his roll instead.

"You're not going to be late, are you?" he asked presently.

"How should I know! And must you spend the entire

evening talking about going home? Really, Hugh. You're terribly irritating!"

"Sorry!" he said again, and whistled quietly to the music.

"And don't whistle! It annoys me."

"Well—come and dance," he suggested.

"I hate this tune," and she continued to powder her nose.

Hugh filled Barbara's glass nearly to the top; the waiter having put only a little into it.

"Like a brandy?" he asked.

"I can't drink two things at once! Presently."

Then she put her powder away, had one more look in the small mirror, gave a pat to her hair and picked up her champagne.

"Nobody here I know," she said. "Where is everybody?"

"At home—having cold baths, I expect."

Barbara, having sipped her champagne, picked up her mirror again and looked into it intently.

"Are my lips too red?" she asked, turning. "It's a new kind."

"It suits you."

Barbara looked again.

"It doesn't come off," she said.

"That's good!"

Barbara looked at him.

"Don't say the obvious," she said. "You will always do that."

"Nothing very obvious about that."

"You irritate me dreadfully sometimes," she said.

Hugh continued to finger his roll. Presently:

"You're not in the best of tempers to-night."

"Oh—for Heaven's sake, leave me alone! And cheer up, too. You're looking as glum as a funeral. Every time we go out now, you look as if it pained you. Look at Bertie! He's cheerful enough."

"So am I," Hugh replied. "But I find it a little too hot to be boisterous about it."

"What did you order for me?"

"Smoked salmon."

"Well, can I have it, please?"

Hugh called a waiter and the matter was attended to. Bertie and Pat returned.

"Bertie's collar's collapsed entirely," Pat said, laughingly. "He wants to know where he can get another."

"Oh—it will do!" Barbara said. "Don't be so fussy!"

"Hello—there's Johnny," Pat said, looking towards the door, before sitting down.

Barbara turned.

"Ask them over, Hugh. We can make room."

Hugh beckoned them to his table.

"Major Raynes—Mr. and Mrs. Calthorpe."

"I think I've seen you play at Twickenham," Bertie said, shaking Calthorpe's hand. Greetings from Barbara and Pat. Then they all moved up. Barbara ordered more champagne.

The evening wore on.

"We haven't danced yet," Pat said to Hugh, later on. "Just one—and then you must go home."

"Come on then!"

They walked laughingly to the floor.

"Pretty little thing," Bertie mused. "So naïve."

The band were playing '*Whispering*.' It was encored and encored again.

"Look here," Pat said, returning at last to the window-seat. "If you want to go—I'm game too. I'm terribly tired, really. If it's a question of numbers. . . ."

"Sure?"

"Honest."

They returned and joined the others. Hugh waited until he could sit next to Barbara. Then he said:

"Do you mind if I go? You can stay on. But I've got this big case to-morrow. I don't want to let Fraser down."

"Leave me some money then."

Hugh opened his note-case and squeezed a wad of notes into her hand.

"Sure you don't mind?" he asked again.

"No—I don't mind," and she turned quickly to John Calthorpe on her right.

Just then the band began playing '*Japanese Sandman*.' Bertie rose.

"I claim this one, Barbara," he said, smiling.

John Calthorpe took his wife's hand and led her, too, to the ball-room floor.

"Well," Hugh said, "that makes it easier. I hate excuses, Pat. Let's sneak away."

CHAPTER XIV

THE afternoon sun blazed down from a cloudless sky as Marling entered his taxi. St. James's Street seemed deserted, save for the traffic which passed there. There was a stillness abroad; like an afternoon in some Spanish town. Marling removed his top-hat and mopped his forehead.

The taxi chugged on, through Pall Mall into Trafalgar Square. The tar was melting on the wooden blocks of the roadway and raising itself into small bubbles. The metal studs of the non-skid tyre squashed them and left them in patterns, only to be squashed again into another shape by the next vehicle that passed. The sun-blinds were drawn over every shop-window. Men passed on the pavement at either side, dragging one foot listlessly before the other—some bravely in drill tunics and topees; others with tennis shirts opened at the neck. In Trafalgar Square groups of small boys looked longingly at the water beneath the fountains, only to be deterred in their attempts by the watchful eye of the policeman. Another policeman who raised his arm as the taxi entered the Strand, removed his helmet whilst the traffic block lasted, wiping the running perspiration from his reddened face and neck. 'Bus drivers looked pale and tired as they sat behind purring engines with water pouring over their radiators. Costers with strawberries on barrows, leant against them—their only movement that of driving off the wasps and settling flies. Newsboys sought shelter beneath the sun-blinds of

the shops and called not, either, of their wares. Heat rose from the scorching pavements in eddies that were visible to the naked eye. There was, save for the hum of droning motors, a silence—a silence of inertia. There was no movement other than that of the traffic and of people whose business took them abroad at that time. Flags hung limply at their standards; no breeze cooled the perspiring populace. The water in the radiator of Marling's own taxi was boiling over, too, by the time it was chugging its way up Ludgate Hill.

Marling eventually paid it off outside Dorchester House and went inside. He found Mosenthal in the Board Room.

"Ah—Mr. Marling. You wear always the frock-coat!" he cried laughingly, his hand outstretched. "You are indeed the English who take their pleasures sadly. Why do you not wear the alpaca coat like I do?"

Marling looked at the ill-fitting jacket Mosenthal was wearing.

"All clothes are a nuisance this weather," Marling answered, wiping his forehead. "As we have to wear them—one kind is as good as another." Then he walked to the hat-stand in the corner and hung up his top-hat. "You wanted a word with me?" he said, returning.

"Sit down, Mr. Marling."

"Nothing serious?" Marling asked, looking up.

"Serious?—No, it is not serious. But there are a few things I would like to discuss with you. You would like the cup of tea—yes?"

"No, thank you."

Mosenthal sat beside him.

"Then we will not waste the time," he said, his chubby hands before him on the Board-room table. Then: "But perhaps a cigar? I have the good cigars."

"Thank you—yes, I'll smoke a cigar."

Mosenthal rose and walked quickly to a cabinet in the far corner of the room. He opened the box of cigars carefully and smelt them. "Ah—they are in good condition, too," he said. "They are my very special cigars." Then he walked over to Marling and placed the box before him.

"They are very special. I give them only to my good friends. At Christmas I will send some to you. They are very good."

Marling chose at random and lighted his.

"Yes," he said, exhaling. "They are certainly good." Then he sat, as if waiting for Mosenthal.

"For myself," Mosenthal said, "I will drink the cup of tea. You will not change your mind—no?"

Marling shook his head. Mosenthal then pressed the bell on the Board-room table as he stood beside it.

"Order me a cup of tea," he said to Bernher.

Bernher bowed stiffly and retired. Mosenthal resumed his seat.

"It is good of you to come," he said. "The weather it is hot. And you—ah, you should wear the alpaca coat like me. To see you in your thick black coat, it worry me. It is too hot for such respectability. The alpaca coat—feel—it is so thin! It is what I always wear when the weather is hot."

"Indeed?" Marling said, puffing thoughtfully.

A girl brought in a tray and placed it beside Mosenthal, who quickly poured himself out a cup of tea—strong and black.

"To-day I have a visit from Mr. Speed," he said.

"From the Bank?"

"Yes," Mosenthal answered, drinking noisily, his cup held in both hands. "He speak with me about our overdraft."

Marling looked up.

"He's not questioning it?" he asked.

"For himself—no. Mr. Speed is our good friend. But his headquarters, they would like it reduced."

"What is it to-day?"

Mosenthal returned his cup to its saucer.

"It is nearly one hundred thousand pounds," he answered. "It is a mere nothing. It is a thing I do not consider, in the usual way."

"And how long have we had that overdraft now?" Marling asked.

"It is a variable sum and it has been going on for some

long time. It has, of course, been larger than that. But the Bank, they have confidence in our undertaking."

"Then why do they question it to-day?"

Mosenthal shrugged his shoulders.

"There have been the bad things said of our Combine since our meeting," he said. "Some very bad things."

Marling looked up.

"Your policy has been attacked," he replied, "because you ignored the fact that this industry might not be safeguarded. You just went ahead—assuming that it would be."

Mosenthal's eyes glared.

"Yes," he said, "I did. I did not consider that the English could be so damn foolish! The lessons of the past—they stare them in the face. They study their lessons—and still they give way. Oh—it is damn fool!" he said, banging the table with his fist. "It is completely damn fool. Already the foreigner he is beginning his campaign against us. Look at France! Their factories are reconstructed. They are producing. They have not the trouble of their labour. They produce at the economical price. Already we are losing to them some of the contracts we consider ours. But the Government of this country! They give always to the foreigner! It make me sick, I tell you. It make me sick and tired!"

Marling flicked his cigar ash into the tray before him.

"For why you English go to war?" Mosenthal continued, angrily. "The world it is yours when the Peace came. But you English, you cannot soil your hands by keeping the foreigner out. You must be always the perfect gentlemen of commerce! And the world it laugh at you! It do not think twice of safeguarding itself against you and your goods. The world it is not so damn fool. It know to exist—it must fight. *Fight*, I tell you." Mosenthal shrugged his shoulders and poured himself out another cup of black tea. "Oh, your politicians" he said, "they are completely damn fool!"

"This overdraft—what do they suggest?" Marling asked, unmoved.

"It must be reduced," Mosenthal replied, "or we find the guarantor."

"For how much?"

"Well—there is the matter, also, of Hendersons to be considered."

"How much are we still owing them?"

"I have not the exact figure. It is nearly forty thousand."

Mosenthal took his cup again in both hands.

"Forty thousand?" Marling mused.

"It has been outstanding already too long," Mosenthal went on, between large gulps of black tea. "There is something to be said, my friend," he said smilingly, "for the influence that I have. Otherwise we pay the full amount before this. But the world it try to pretend that I have the ulterior motive when I give the contracts to Hendersons. But then, I do not care what the world say about me. It is only for the Combine that I care. But you see—it was the good thing that I do. We have the long credit. That is good—eh?"

"That will make us one hundred and forty thousand pounds on the wrong side, if we pay now?"

"We will make it the round figure. One hundred and fifty thousand."

"Have you told them about this?"

"Yes, I have told Mr. Speed."

"What does he say?"

"Oh—he has discussed at their headquarters. They will require a guarantor for fifty thousand. That is all."

"One third of the amount?"

"That is so. One third of the amount."

Mosenthal returned his cup again to its saucer. Then he, too, selected a cigar and lighted it.

"That should be a simple matter," Marling said. "But how are things to-day? Are we working full time?"

"The position," Mosenthal replied, "is what I have told you. We have not, through the great foresight of our Government, been successful in obtaining all the business we had hoped. Our factories, therefore, are not working to capacity. That is a thing, of course, that we keep to ourselves. It is not good for the world to know these things."

"Can I see the figures?"

"In my office afterwards we will see them. They are nothing to be concerned about. We still make good progress."

"And the immediate future?"

"Ah—the future! *That*," Mosenthal said, his face relaxing again, "is a matter I do not leave to your clever politicians to settle! When I see the way they go, then I say to myself, unless I—Richard Mosenthal—look after myself, then no one will look after things for me."

Marling looked up.

"Yes, my friend," Mosenthal continued, "that is when I see to things for myself. Our patriotic Government, I find, think only for the foreigner! To wait, therefore, until the market is flooded with their goods would be foolish. We must succeed—in spite of our Government, I say. In *spite* of them! That is funny—eh?"

Marling was scrutinizing his Chairman's face. He seemed unable to read what thoughts lay behind his eyes, half-hidden by those closing eyelids when he smiled. He saw beads of perspiration oozing out of his brown skin and sliding gently down his face—sometimes caught up in the furrowed lines of his cheek.

"Yes, my friend, I do not wait until they have put me out of business. Instead, I devise the ways. I think always of the world as my consumers. I think one moment of Australia. The next moment of South America. I go, in my mind, first here—and then there. I have the market reports. I have always the inside information. So with the first two countries I mention, I send there the men."

"They've been successful?"

"Successful! Ah—they have been more than that. I will show you in a moment the reports and the cables. It is indeed a good thing that we do. It is the best thing that we ever do at this time. It is our first big victory. It will be the big knock for those who do not come in the Combine. We take, too, some of the business from them. That," he added, smiling broadly, "is a matter that give me great pleasure. Very great pleasure!"

"This business is fixed, then?"

"Fixed? The contracts they are not signed. But our samples have been approved. Our prices are accepted."

"What is the value?"

Mosenthal leant nearer.

"For the first year," he said, whispering almost into Marling's ear, "it will bring us a quarter of a million pounds. *A quarter of a million pounds!*"

"But, my dear Mosenthal. . . ."

"Ah—you are surprised—eh? You do not think it is possible? Ah—but there are many who do not think possible the things that I do." Then he reached forward for a match; his cigar had gone out.

"But a quarter of a million pounds, Mosenthal. . . ."

Mosenthal looked at him.

"It is only the beginning," he said, airily.

"But this is remarkable," Marling said. "This alters the position entirely. I mean, a quarter of a million pounds at this time. . . ."

"Yes, my friend. It is 'talking,' as you say."

"Is the price very cut?"

"Yes—it is cut. But there is a big margin."

Marling sat thoughtfully. Then he said:

"I am delighted. Frankly, I've been worried. I've been worried for some time."

"I, too, have been worried, my friend. But what is the good of that? To succeed one must have the smiling face, the manner of cheerfulness—of optimism. That is the expression of success. You cannot succeed with the glum face."

Presently:

"There's no doubt about it, I suppose?"

"There is no doubt—no. Presently, you will see the correspondence."

"When will it come into operation?"

"They want the deliveries in the New Year. That is, in South America. In Australia by March. Those are the first deliveries."

"Well, I'm heartily relieved," Marling said, presently. "It couldn't have come at a better time. This, indeed, will be an answer to our critics."

"Yes—it will answer them. And they have been unkind, Mr. Marling," he said, looking at him, "the people who criticize us."

"Yes," Marling said, laying his cigar ash again into the tray. "They have. Most unfair!"

"Unfair? But who in the world of business is not unfair? To survive—someone must always go under. And there are many who would like to see us do that. We are a thorn in their side. But, my friend, I have been the thorn in so many sides. It is a rôle in life that I enjoy. I do not call it unfair. I call it perhaps in *our* case—the big pity. Our shares, what are they to-day? They stand, my friend, at not six pounds. Not six pounds! But for that business of Jefferson at the meeting, they would be ten pounds to-night. Ten pounds, my friend! That is a big difference!"

"But Jefferson—you're not telling me that he is responsible? . . ."

"Mr. Marling," he said, puffing hard at his re-lighted cigar, "I speak merely the truth. From the moment the papers write of the brawling at our meeting, there have been people who lose their confidence in us. They dwell on the position, too, that I hold as having the controlling interest in Hendersons, and the fact that I give to them the business. Well, what is that? We get the good service from Hendersons. We do not, either—as I explained, be worried over the outstanding account. It was inconvenient to pay in full, was it not, when the work was completed? So do they press us? No, they do not mention the matter. But we cannot continue in this way. The account must be met, either in cash or in bills. But would that have been possible, I ask you, had I not a controlling interest in that firm? No, I tell you. So much, therefore, for the things they say!" And Mosenthal snapped his fingers angrily. "And the question of the money we pay for goodwill to the companies we absorb," he continued. "Is it not better to have a willing servant when the air is electric with the discontent and schemings of our competitors? Is it not better to pay well when we take them in and not bicker over the price that we

pay? I know the value of each undertaking. I do not pay too much. But I pay well. That is because it pay me well to do it. I do not waste the money that has been subscribed. I know too well the value of money. When I begin my life I think whether I go to my work by the tram-car or whether I walk. And usually I walk and save the penny. And all my life I think in that way. I do not spend—when I can save. That is the first thing I learn from my father. And that is the lesson I carry with me till I die. It is such a foolish thing to say of me. It is as foolish as the things they say of me about Hendersons."

Marling continued to puff silently at his cigar.

"What are the shares to-night?" he asked presently.

"I inquire of Mr. Greville just as you come. Five and seven-eighths they were. It is a terrible price."

"Yes," Marling frowned. "They've dropped from nine. That's bad."

"Soon they will be half unless we do the big business and counteract the stupid things that the papers write. Ah, my friend, when I think of the false move we make! That Jefferson—we should have settled with him. Five thousand pounds—what is that beside the money that you and I lose to-day?"

"But blackmail, Mosenthal!"

"Blackmail! We have discussed that word before." Again he leant nearer. "Is it better, I ask you, to pay this man so small a sum to keep him quiet and so save the money for the thousands of people who invest in our Combine? Which is better, I ask you?"

Marling removed his handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

"I would not sit on any Board," he said, "which allowed itself to be browbeaten into meeting common blackmail. Neither would I associate myself with any undertaking whose past actions placed them in the position of having to meet it. That I would like you to understand clearly."

Then he put his handkerchief away.

"For the way you talk, Mr. Marling, I respect you.

Those are the feelings I expect you to have. For myself, I share them also. I could not have reached the position of trust that I hold to-day in the city, if my actions had not been completely above reproach. Were I connected with the underhand things—would the city then trust me with its money? That, I think, is the answer to your question. To-morrow if I have the new issue—it will be over-subscribed. The Watling Investment Trust, it is one of the most flourishing in this city. So you see," he said, "I could not associate myself with such an undertaking—either."

Marling seemed struggling in his mind to find the answer to what Mosenthal had said.

"That is common sense," Mosenthal continued. "But there are some things, my friend, on which we do not agree. You see always with the distorted sense of honour. Ah—but it is not a thing for which I do not respect you. You, my friend, are the type of Englishman of which the world thinks when it speaks of your integrity. If I may use the expression—you are the right type of Englishman. The solid, honest, loyal subject. That is good. That is very good. But in commerce—the code is not of so high a standard. When you consider the proposition, you see it as you—Christopher Marling—would view it. But I see it with the results my decision will have upon the market—for the market is the public, and the public, we are their servants. We make for them the dividends—the profits. I do not view the case of Jefferson as an underhand thing. He have a lever which he say he will pull. If that lever is pulled—then it will affect us badly. It will shunt us on to the wrong line. A siding, maybe. That is bad for us. And when we consider Jefferson's claim we should have faced that. We should have faced the possibility of his raising the unpleasant matters at so public an affair as the meeting of the Company. For we know that we do not want the linen to be washed in public. Especially at this time."

"You were not obliged to take my advice," Marling said.

"That is so—yes."

"Did you discuss it with any other members of the Board?"

"No," Mosenthal answered. "I did not. I discuss it with you—as the lawyer. Like a fool I follow you."

Marling looked up quickly.

"Ah—I did not mean that you should take me wrongly. Usually, my friend, I act alone. I do not ask the advice. That is where I was the fool—in not acting alone. If I had—then I would have settled with Jefferson and our meeting it would have passed successfully. The people they would not have had the wrong ideas put into their minds then so that they go away and sell their shares because they begin to lose confidence. That is the thing. Together we have made a false move. The effects of it we see to-day. It is a thousand pities, my friend, a thousand pities."

"On the face of things—it is," Marling said thoughtfully. "And yet, I'm afraid I'd give you the same advice to-day, Mosenthal."

"Ah—but you speak, then, as the lawyer, my friend. When you help to control the destiny of this great Combine, you must think, then, as I do. As the man who controls a world-wide product. And any action you take will have definite effect upon some corner of the globe. In this case, the effect was nearer to hand. It has affected even our own pockets. That is bad," he added jokingly. "It is bad enough—eh?—to lose money for other people. It is worse to lose it for oneself!"

Marling shifted his position, crossing now the other leg.

"I suppose," Marling said presently, "that you are right." He said that thoughtfully, after having given to it some moments of concentrated thought. "Not in that I have lost money for myself," he continued. "But there are two distinct points of view. I can't help seeing that. You are right when you say that I regarded this Jefferson business from a purely legal point of view. I did. I have never had to face such a situation for myself. For my clients—yes. And I advised them as I advised you."

Mosenthal rose and in passing Marling's chair, he patted him on the back.

"I am glad, my friend, that you see the distinction," he said. "There was a time when I feared that you would never see that. Then you agree that it was the mistake we make over Jefferson? The big mistake?"

"Yes," Marling replied, thoughtfully. "As it has turned out—it was."

"Good! Good! Then at last we see eye to eye. That is good!"

A silence followed this remark. Mosenthal was standing by the window, looking out into the street.

"I must have the sun-blinds fitted," he said, casually. "This room, it gets very hot."

Another silence.

"I am delighted about these two contracts, Mosenthal," Marling said presently, "They've certainly come at the right time."

Mosenthal turned.

"It is only the beginning," he said again.

"You'll be seeing Speed," Marling asked. "When?"

"To-morrow I see him."

"You'll have no difficulty over the guarantor?"

Mosenthal walked slowly back to the Board-room table.

"I have been thinking about that," he said. "That is what I wish to discuss with you. It would be a pity, I think, to go outside the Combine to find the guarantor. We do not wish the world to know that we have the overdraft. That would be bad for the propaganda, eh?"

"What are your views?"

"Well," Mosenthal replied, sitting once more at Marling's side. "I regard the position this way: There is Henry Newcomb, I say. He is the proprietor of the newspapers. But the new paper he recently put on the market, it does not do well. I am assured he will lose money over his new paper. It would be inconvenient for him to act, maybe. And besides, I would not care to embarrass myself if he refuse. That would not be good. Then I think of Sir John Bickworth. But he is a cold man; a man without the warm blood of companionship. He is a man who think firstly of—himself. No, I think it would not be good to ask him. I would not

like to be under the obligation. Then I think of Mr. Holbrook. But of him, I know the position. But two years ago he was Works Manager. It is I who bring him to the big position on the Board. But he know his job; he is good there. But he is not a man of substance. And as I think these things, I say to myself—who is it that make this bad blunder? And I say—it is Mr. Marling and myself. Ah—yes, I, too, take the blame. And so I say—then *I* will act as the guarantor. But when I look into the position I find that the many things in which I am interested need badly all the backing that I can give to them. It would be inconvenient, therefore, at this moment for me to guarantee the overdraft. And then I say to myself—Mr. Marling, he is a man of honour. He, too, will accept the responsibility for the false move we make together. For him, he has not the many obligations that I have. Yes! I say—Mr. Marling, he will act as guarantor."

"But fifty thousand pounds, Mosenthal. . . ."

"But what is that, my friend? You lodge with the Bank securities for that amount. They lay in the vaults of the Bank in perfect safety. And for how long? Three months? Four, perhaps? These new contracts—they will alter the position entirely. Then we settle with Hendersons. We satisfy the Bank and we proceed to our prosperity. It is nothing. It is a matter only of form."

Christopher Marling looked again into the smiling face at his side. The lines round Mosenthal's eyes seemed to be tying them almost into knots, so that they disappeared entirely. He looked away, drumming his fingers idly on the table.

"Let me see the contracts," he said presently.

In a moment the door leading into Mosenthal's office had opened; Mosenthal was holding it. Then it closed silently behind both of them.

CHAPTER XV

THE torrid summer wore on. Days passed into weeks, weeks passed into months, but still no rain fell. London became an inferno by day; at night a sweltering nightmare of insomnia. It was beginning to affect the nerves of the people.

Hugh was noticing its effect upon Barbara. They had been to Brioni together for three weeks, where he had hoped the rest would benefit her. But they had returned from the sunshine of the Adriatic only to find London jaded and brown, the people still tired and listless. And Barbara returned quickly to her old condition—irritable, tired, pale and constantly depressed. Hugh was frankly alarmed. It was unlike her. She, who was always the leader of her set, seemed now the one who held back always. She wanted only to lie about. That was all she asked for. And to be left alone. Theatres bored her. She said so. Night clubs were a nuisance; she hated people so. Nothing interested her; nothing satisfied. Hugh had suggested a cruise. He could not afford it, but what did anything matter beside Barbara's health? But no—she hated the sea; it made her sick. Hugh had suggested going up to the Barlows' shoot when they took it in September. Scotland might be cooler. But no—Barbara could think of nothing worse than spending a month with the Barlows. So Hugh had left the matter, feeling considerably unhappy about leaving it. Dr. Simpson had said that it was merely the heat; he had many such cases. But Barbara was so vital; she had never collapsed so completely before. In India she was on her feet from morning till night—happy, laughing and energetic. But now she lay most of the day on the Italian sofa in her drawing-room, the gramophone by her side.

The continued heat was telling upon Hugh, too. As he left his chambers in Pump Court that afternoon, he found himself irritated also—and over the smallest thing. He had been down to collect some letters at his chambers.

Whilst there he had rung up Old Christopher, but the line was engaged. He rang again and was then given the wrong number. From that moment his temper had become uncontrolled. *Everything* had seemed wrong. When he found that Trevor Paget, who shared his chambers, had borrowed one of his reference books and that Trevor was out of town—he had become enraged. But, of course, as he told himself when he returned once more to his normal self, the weather *was* getting the limit! Besides, Barbara was worrying him, too. . . .

Opposite the Law Courts he hailed a taxi and drove to King Street. . . . And they were getting infernally hard up. There seemed no chance, either, of a respite. If it was not one thing—then it was another. Brioni, in common with all holiday resorts, had been more expensive than he had planned. And Hugh had imagined that the end of August would have been a quiet time in London. Yet no sooner had they returned than Bertie had followed them over from Paris, where they had stayed one night on the return journey. Sybil was in town, too. Endless foursomes had taken place—usually at Hugh's expense. And as Hugh had explained—even going out at somebody else's expense becomes costly. There were always the taxis—even the laundry and cleaners' bills and the tips. But Barbara could never see those things. "What are they, anyhow?" she asked. And the Sparkes had returned from their holiday before Bertie had left and more parties had been arranged. The result of all this was, of course, a complete collapse of Barbara. She was in a continuous mood of utter indifference—to everything. She seemed too tired to take part—even in conversation. Her vitality had left her completely. Irritability seemed her only effort, and that, too, was waning—into indifference. . . . Hugh longed for the cool of the Autumn to come.

His worries were more than those of merely being short of money; he was getting into debt. Barbara's bill at Antoine's had assumed a terrifying figure. As he explained to Barbara before leaving for Brioni—he could dress himself for five years on what she had spent—in

three months. It was wickedly extravagant of her. 'Wicked' only because she knew the size of his income and of how long it would take him to pay that bill. It was wrong, therefore, to take things from shopkeepers when you knew that they could not be paid for—perhaps for a year or more. And then only with scraping. "But, my dear boy," Barbara had said, "they pile it on—knowing that! Men's tailors do the same thing. They all live on credit." And with a wave of the hand the matter was ended—so far as Barbara was concerned. But, of course, it hadn't happened that way. Antoine had demanded payment—even before they had left for Brioni. So before leaving, Hugh had sent as much as he could afford—on account. And as he had written from his chambers, the reply had been sent there. He had found another letter waiting for him that afternoon. Antoine's could not allow the account to run on indefinitely. Twenty pounds was too small a sum to pay on account. Would he please take steps to settle—in full, or to make some reasonable offer. Also, they could accept no liability for the supposed flaw in the mink coat which Madame had pointed out to them. That flaw had been occasioned by damage—in wear. The coat was in perfect condition when sold to her. . . . And Hugh's bank account was already on the wrong side. Quarter Day was still a month ahead, when his allowance was paid to him, and a few dividends fell due. The ordinary tradesmen's bills had to be met meantime.

Of course, he could always arrange an overdraft. That was not the point. This bill of Antoine's represented nearly a quarter of their year's income. It was of no material benefit to him to know that the coat was a 'good investment,' as Barbara termed it. Or that it would wear for years. His immediate problem was to pay—or appease Antoine. And the problem of how to do that worried him considerably.

The obvious thing to do was to go to Old Christopher. But equally obviously he couldn't do that. For one thing, Hugh felt his obligations keenly enough as it was. Secondly, Old Christopher would never understand Bar-

bara's point of view. *Of course*, she was extravagant. Hugh could never deny that. But Old Christopher would read into it something more than mere extravagance. And that Hugh could not allow to happen. Their relations were not all that he desired already. For some long time there had been an 'atmosphere' between them. If Hugh analysed it, it really came into being after he had remonstrated with Barbara for her rudeness to his father. Once that had happened and Barbara had seen that Hugh was firm in his demands—she had obeyed. But she had obeyed in such a manner as to bring an artificiality into their relationship. It was forced; it was *too* polite. And Old Christopher was sincere—too honest in his dealings. Hugh felt that his father was seeing through that and was feeling ill at ease because of it. So he had spoken to Barbara again—"For God's sake, Hugh! Is there nothing I do that is right? First I'm too rude. Now I'm too polite. You're absolutely impossible!" Then she had stormed out of the dining-room, her head thrown back.

So their relations had not improved. . . . The plans that Hugh had made two years before had not turned out exactly as he had hoped. Barbara and his father were good friends, of course. It was only that they lacked that indefinable thing that makes for completeness. It seemed to Hugh that the gulf between them could not be bridged. It could, perhaps, with time. It was the misunderstandings of two very different generations. Their points of view were poles apart. It was no good attempting to right those matters; they had to right themselves. Spontaneity was the essence of the solution, and that had to come of its own accord. Time, then, was the only cure. Barbara would learn more quickly as she grew older. She assimilated things more quickly than anyone he knew. It was only that Barbara refused to accept responsibilities —yet. She refused to be bothered with them. Hers was an age when to live was the foremost thing to be considered—and to live life to its hilt. The more material things would come after, when her attractions were not so keenly obvious to her that she could enjoy using them

and watching their effects upon those around her. Whilst London fell at her feet—that was as much as Barbara could manage. Her days were filled by doing those things that London expected of her. Men said that she was lovely; therefore she must keep herself lovely and live up to that reputation. Men said that she was amusing; she must therefore keep abreast of the times so that she could talk with them of things of the moment—of current affairs. Women—the most cruel of all critics—said that she was 'smart.' She must, therefore, be dressed entirely according to fashion's latest decree—for what is worse than to be heralded as a smart woman? Are not the eyes of all women turned towards you then, devouring every detail? And if you are found to be wrong in any of them —does not your reputation fall further to the ground than if nothing had been said? Barbara had discussed these things openly, for she had no false ideas of conceit. She had explained them in detail to Hugh. Her parties, too. Were they not considered some of the best in London? To give her guests anything but the best champagne would be pure stupidity. People expected it. And Hugh had seen her point of view. It was only a question of L.S.D. These things were all very well, if you could afford them. After all, Hugh was intensely proud of Barbara. What man could help being proud of a wife for whom all men—and women—clamoured? What man could help being proud of a wife whose parties were accepted as the best in London? And if it came to that, what man could help being proud of having a wife who was acclaimed one of the best-dressed women in London? If one could afford it—it was man's greatest ideal. Hugh loved to look at Barbara. The fact that he had to meet large bills at Elizabeth Arden's did not worry him. On one occasion she had allowed her hair to grow too long and Hugh had been frankly disappointed. He had owned to that. After all—those things *do* matter. But the whole effect now was that when he entered a public place with Barbara at his side, he *knew* that all eyes were upon her and that she was one of the most perfect women in that room. Men take

pride in these things—and especially Hugh—for the pride of ownership is a large thing in a man's make-up.

There was nothing, therefore, to be done. Hugh had only to wait. With the years she would soften, become more pliable—more understanding. Whilst her popularity increased, so would the task become more difficult. Meanwhile Hugh had to face the fact that Old Christopher and Barbara knew each other not at all. Each would find something that, to the other, was not understandable. In trying to solve it—which Old Christopher did—he would, in wading through the morass, become more involved in its complexities. And Barbara, who did not try to solve Old Christopher at all, merely looked upon the things that he did, and stood for, as of utter boredom and Victorianism. There the matter remained. To explain that Barbara had run up a bill of nearly five hundred pounds with her dressmaker would only widen the gulf between them. For that reason Hugh could not discuss the matter with his father. But he had to do something about it, all the same. Antoine's had to be paid. The fact that a bill of this magnitude was outstanding at all—apart from the fact that the extravagance had been committed—was a matter that would cause Old Christopher considerable pain. And the settlement of the bill was Hugh's affair, for Barbara *was* his wife. And Hugh had never been allowed to run up bills. . . . Supposing they sued him! . . . That, of course, would be the crowning limit. Old Christopher would never recover from that. . . .

The taxi was proceeding westwards along the Strand. It passed Hummers on the left-hand side. . . . Hugh wondered whether the solution lay that way. They were an old established firm and of good standing. It would be different going to them. . . . But had he anything that was of any value? It was only the small things, such as jewellery, that he could take there. It amounted to pawning, whatever he did. But this was not an occasion when he could afford to stand on his dignity. . . . There was the flat watch that Barbara had given him. . . . No, he wouldn't like to pawn that. . . . But still, something

had to be done. His watch-chain, his pearl studs. . . . Ah—pearls! . . . But no, Barbara couldn't pawn her pearls! . . . Yet after all, something had to be done. Antoine's bill had to be paid. And after all, too, it might make Barbara realize the value of money, if her pearls had to be pawned to help pay for her fur coat. . . . A hard lesson, perhaps. Yet after all, she had to learn it one day. She was quite hopeless about money now, and unless she had to face some tangible thing such as losing her pearls, he doubted very much whether she would ever learn. But still, he hated the thought of her doing that. But then—what would his own few things realize? Fifty? A hundred? Of course, you wouldn't get their value—in pawn. They'd only pay you a small proportion. And, of course, to Barbara, this idea of pawning things would be quite repulsive. There would be a scene. There was bound to be. But was there any other way out? He could promise Antoine so much a month, but five hundred pounds takes a lot of paying off. . . . No, it was better to settle outright, if he could. Then they'd go slow and get the things out of pawn as soon as they could afford to do it. It was unpleasant, but after all, there *was* this to be said for it—it would bring them down to Earth, and that was what both of them were needing. He'd talk it over with Barbara that night. They'd make lists and he would go to see Hummers with the jewellery to-morrow. He didn't like the idea, but it had to be done. Anything was better than the present situation. After all, too, Barbara needed something like this badly. It would cause intense suffering—to her pride. And no man is worth his salt until he has known suffering. And this applies more forcibly to a woman—especially if she is an attractive woman.

Hugh paid off his taxi outside his father's office and climbed the pile-carpeted stairs. He felt better already. There was a way out after all. Of course, Old Christopher had given Barbara that string. He would miss it, of course, if she wasn't wearing it. But they could say it had gone to have its clasp repaired. Or better still, he could have an imitation made of it. Such pearls were being

advertised extensively to-day. Then no one would be the wiser, and they would all emerge from the situation the better for having had to face it. After all, it all revolved around Barbara. And once she realized the value of money she would soon appreciate the value of other fundamental things—Old Christopher being one of the most important. . . . Yes, that was the only way out.

"Is my father in?" he asked Benson, in his small office at the top of the stairs.

Benson rose and removed his pince-nez.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Hugh, he has a client with him at the moment. Perhaps you'll sit in here. Or would you rather go to Mr. Buxton? He is disengaged."

"No. I'll sit with you, Benson. It's cool here."

Benson removed some papers from a chair.

"It's still very hot, sir," Benson said.

Hugh sat down and fanned himself with the newspaper he carried.

"It's the limit," he said. "One wants to change every hour. I'm soaking and I've driven here."

"Yes, sir—yes. I find it very trying, too. And my garden, you know, is completely ruined. My roses—I had a lovely showing last year—but they're all shrivelled now. And now that we can't even water them—there's no hope, I'm afraid."

"You're a great gardener?"

"I like it. Pottering about, you know, sir. A nice hobby. I take a pride in the bit I've got. It isn't large, you know. I've got a bit of grass, too, but that's all burnt up now. I'm afraid it's not much good worrying this year. The ground's like stone, too. It's cracking all over the place now. I spent a lot of time on it in the spring. It's disappointing to see it go this way."

"It must be."

"But still, we grumble when we don't get any sun, so I suppose we ought to be grateful now that we've got it. But, of course, you're used to it, I suppose? Being out in India so long?"

"A different heat, Benson. We dressed accordingly,

too. I've felt it more this summer than at any time before. Even Mesopotamia."

"Is that so, sir? That speaks volumes for it, then, doesn't it?"

"Will my father be long?"

"I couldn't really say. I'll let him know you're here, if you wish."

"Don't worry. I'll wait."

"You'd like something to read, perhaps. I've got to-day's *Times*."

"Thank you. I've read it."

"Then you won't mind if I get on with my work, sir?" Benson asked, turning round in his chair.

"No—please do."

Hugh turned over the pile of newspapers on the ledge by the window.

"Hello!" he said. "I'm surprised to see you reading *John Citizen*, Benson!"

Benson turned.

"Ah," he smiled. "Young Arthur brought it in. There's a bit in it about Mr. Mosenthal. Knowing Mr. Marling was a friend of his, he thought I might be interested."

"Mosenthal?—In this rag?"

"I've not read the article myself," Benson said, removing his pince-nez. "Arthur only gave it me after lunch to-day."

"Where is it?" Hugh asked, turning the pages thoughtfully.

"It's only a paragraph, I think. Arthur's marked it. Can I help you? . . ."

"I've got it."

Hugh put the paper on his knees and read it carefully.

"The swine!" he said, looking up.

"May I see, sir?" Benson asked, returning the pince-nez to the bridge of his nose with a troubled look.

"That's libellous!" Hugh explained when Benson had finished.

"It reads badly," Benson replied thoughtfully.

"Has my father seen it?"

"Not that I'm aware, sir."

"Give it me again!"

Benson rose and stood behind Hugh's chair, re-reading it with him. Presently their eyes met.

"What do you make of it, Benson?"

"It reads very badly, sir," Benson replied again.

"It's the grossest libel!"

"It's a habit of that paper, sir," Benson said, standing upright again. "They always sail near to the wind. And usually they get away with it, too. It's very unsavoury, sir. Very unsavoury."

"It's damnable! They say they'll have some more details next week. My father must see this at once."

"Yes—of course. It's most unpleasant. Mr. Mosenthal will have to take action. Very unfortunate—very unfortunate. Law actions against *John Citizen* are very unfortunate." And Benson was rapping his pince-nez against the palm of his left hand.

Hugh sat with the paper in his hands.

"That's what they're after," he said. "A law case. They couldn't print such stuff otherwise."

"Yes—it looks like it," Benson replied. "That's the way they usually work."

"But this affects the Company, too. My father's on the Board."

"I know, sir. It's most unfortunate. The guv'nor mixed up in a thing of this kind! Of course, there can't be any truth in it."

"Of course there can't!"

A silence.

"Tell my father I'm here!"

Benson worked the small switch-board in the absence of the girl—on holiday.

"Mr. Hugh is here and would like to see you, sir." Then—"Is it urgent? Yes, sir, I think it is. Five minutes? Very good."

"Five minutes," he repeated for Hugh's benefit.

Both sat silently once more.

"My father will hate this."

"I'm afraid he will, sir. A great believer in Mr. Mosenthal. I must say he's always struck me as a very clever

gentleman. Well respected, too. Not the sort of gentleman to be mixed up in a thing of this sort. It's very unsavoury," Benson repeated again.

"What's the next move?"

"Well—it's obvious they mean to go on—they mean business."

"The swine!" Hugh said and threw the paper angrily on one side. "This sort of thing makes me livid! How can one defend oneself against attacks like this? There's only the law—and that's a long-drawn-out business, with the papers writing it up all the time with loathsome headlines. This has got to be stopped!"

"Difficult, sir," Benson said. "I remember a case some years ago. Your father refused to have anything to do with it. So Brancaster acted for the plaintiffs and they lost their case. It broke them, too," he added. "They're a difficult proposition—*John Citizen.*"

"Well, thank God Mosenthal's powerful," Hugh said. "Thank God for that! He's got the power to stop it, anyway. They'll never dare go on against Mosenthal. They must be mad to consider it."

"They don't actually *say* much, of course. It's the inference."

"Anyone reading that," Hugh said, "would not be in two minds about what they mean! And they go on to say there'll be other interesting details next week. As if any shareholder *could* have been treated that way! It's not possible."

"Of course, there has been a lot of adverse criticism in the papers these last few months," Benson said, thoughtfully. "You may have seen them, perhaps?"

"My dear Benson, that is a very different matter! That was attacking his policy. This rag is attacking his honour. A very different matter, Benson!"

A buzzer rang. Marling's door along the passage opened. A man passed and proceeded down the stairs to the street.

"Will you go in, sir—or shall I ring first?"

"I'll go in."

Hugh reached for the copy of *John Citizen* and walked quickly down the passage to his father's room.

"Ah—Hugh!" and Marling was rising from his chair. "Nice to see you, my boy. It's still infernally hot. Bless my soul, the afternoon sun just makes this room seem like a bake-house. Can't keep it out."

"Have you seen this, Dad?"

"What, boy?"

Marling adjusted his horn-rimmed spectacles and took the paper. Hugh watched the colour rising presently in his father's cheek. Then Marling returned the paper to his desk.

"That's very bad," he said, slowly. "That's very bad, Hugh."

"It's damnable!"

A silence.

"How did you see this?"

"Benson. Arthur showed it to him. It's libellous, Dad!"

"It—is."

"I suppose there can't be any truth in it?"

Marling looked up.

"Would I be associated with Mosenthal, if there were?"

"Then what? . . ."

Marling mopped his forehead, as a man who was infinitely tired—a physical weariness.

"Hugh," he said, "this is the worst thing that could have happened. For Mosenthal it will be a blow—a terrific blow."

"But he'll stop it. He's powerful enough!"

"That he may be able to do. I'll put a call through right away."

He reached for the telephone.

"Get me on to Mr. Mosenthal," he said. "You'll find him at the Watling Investment Trust."

Then Marling turned and looked out of the window at his right.

"It's preposterous!" Hugh said.

Marling looked at his son.

"It is," he said. "It is."

"But why—*why?*" Hugh asked. "What does it all mean?"

Marling ran his bare hand over his forehead.

"Do you remember that man at the meeting?" he asked. "The fellow who caused all the trouble?"

"Yes—I do."

"He was an ex-employee. He was sacked shortly before the meeting."

"But he was only a whipper-snapper. He can't be responsible for this sort of thing?"

"I'm afraid—he is," Marling answered, slowly.

"But does he know anything? Has he really got anything tangible to work on?"

"Men of that kind," Marling said, "always have a grouse. They whine—whatever happens. You know the type. You see them everywhere. In all large organizations you'll find them. Jefferson was such a man."

"Well?" Hugh asked, presently, his father having sat for some moments, his finger-tips together.

"Yes—Jefferson was such a man," Marling repeated again, as if his thoughts were far away.

The telephone rang. With a jump, Marling reached for it.

"Mosenthal? Marling here. *John Citizen!* Have you seen it? Page thirteen. What? Get a copy! I'll come down this evening. Yes—about six. Yes. Right!"

He replaced the receiver thoughtfully.

"I don't follow, Dad."

"It's a long story, boy," and Marling was sitting again, that far-away look in his eyes. "A long story."

"Are you sure of Mosenthal? Really sure?" Hugh asked suddenly.

"Yes, Hugh. Mosenthal's honest. Mosenthal's a big man. Like all big men—he has enemies. Over this Combine—he has many. It is a thousand pities," he added, thoughtfully, "a thousand pities."

"But this fellow Jefferson—he's too small, surely, to harm Mosenthal?"

"He tried to blackmail us," Marling answered.

"You!"

"No, no. The Combine, boy—the Combine."

"And then?"

"We refused to listen. My advice, too. Then he started stirring up trouble."

"But if there was nothing to be ashamed of—where does he stand?"

"With our competitors behind him" Marling said, "he can risk the penalties of libel and get good compensation for doing it. It only needs a whisper to start people talking where big companies are concerned. Confidence—that is what is shaken then. Confidence, Hugh."

"But *John Citizen*? Could this man be responsible for this? How could he do it?"

"That is a matter, Hugh, on which I have no knowledge. The ways and means of such schemes are beyond me. Sufficient to know that they are done. This story is, of course, a trumped-up one. That I can assure you. But *John Citizen* takes the part always of the under-dog. This is a supposed case."

"What will you do?"

"I don't know," Marling said, presently. "Fight it, I suppose."

"Is that advisable? I mean, won't that make the whole thing terribly public?"

"Do you imagine that Mosenthal will sit down under that?" Marling asked, his eyes, for the first time, showing the hidden anger that lay beneath.

"Well—I'm told that's the way *John Citizen* works. They *make* you take it to law. That's to expose the whole business."

"There is no business to expose," Marling snapped. "Understand that, Hugh! It is a trumped-up case with a definite purpose of doing us harm. The affair at the meeting was the first example we had. This is the next move in the game. Confound them!" he added, banging his desk. "Confound them!"

Hugh had seldom seen his father really angered. He looked away.

"I'm damned sorry for Mosenthal," Hugh said. "I don't know what I'd do in his shoes, Dad. To be attacked

publicly by anyone is bad enough—but in *John Citizen* among the filths! Arrayed in the same page among seducers, blackmailers and the dregs of society! It's pretty rotten."

"Confound them!" Marling said again.

"There is only one thing to hope—that Newcomb or somebody in Fleet Street can step in right away and prevent anything from appearing next week. Then it may all blow over. Who reads the rag, anyway? Not the sort of people who can afford to buy 'Combine' shares. There's a lot in that," Hugh added.

"Yes," Marling said, "that is what I have been thinking, too. Yes, the people who matter may not see it. It doesn't matter among the rank and file. The thing's a try-on. It must be. They wouldn't dare. The thing's absurd! It's preposterous! Damn it, Hugh, I may not always agree with Mosenthal, but he's honest. Could he have risen to his present position in the city if he were anything but the soul of honesty? That is the answer which Mosenthal himself gave to me. And a more conclusive answer a man cannot give. There have been times when, I confess, I have been puzzled. Little things that arose in the course of our relations as co-directors. But he had always an answer to them—a conclusive answer. I found, on further consideration, that it was I who was at fault. And only because my ideas are perhaps based on a code which is fast becoming obsolete. There was nothing dishonest in Mosenthal's actions. He was only fighting the world with its own weapons. You see what our competitors will do to *us*! There are no depths, therefore, to which we must not sink to frustrate them! Can we sit aloft and watch them swirling up the dregs? Can we sit by and watch them doing that? No, Hugh, the world is changing. It is changing on every side. I see things happening around me that I find hard to believe. Years ago I should have considered them impossible. Progression? This, I suppose, is Progression. . . . This business efficiency! It is all efficiency to-day! Quick methods of selling—quick methods of obtaining the business in the first case. Bribes, illicit commissions—where,

I ask myself, is business conducted as it was years ago? . . . No, Hugh, the world is changing. I find it difficult to adapt myself." And then he added: "It will be easier for you, Son."

Hugh looked at his father.

"It'll blow over," he said, smiling sympathetically. "Of course it will blow over. They wouldn't dare. You're quite right."

"Hugh—I'll tell you something. It's been on my mind. This fellow Jefferson. He demanded five thousand pounds. There was nothing in writing, but he contended that he was entitled to some commission. Even that little worm, Bernher, called it blackmail—before even I discussed it with Mosenthal. It *was* blackmail. No doubt about it. Mosenthal asked me about it. I refused, and continued to refuse, a settlement. The case didn't go to court—as I told Mosenthal it would not. But worse happened. You know it all—you've seen. The meeting, the discussion it caused—until to-day, I am confronted with *this*!"

"Did you foresee any of this?"

"Mosenthal," Marling said, "hinted that the man would stir up trouble. But what could I see in that? The thing was preposterous! He—a little clerk—fighting Mosenthal! The thing was absurd on the face of it. Besides, I had never come face to face with blackmail before. I fought Mosenthal tooth and nail. I threatened to resign. That was the last thing he seemed to want. Then he gave in."

"And if you'd paid up in the first case?"

"Our shares, Hugh, would be standing at their old price. Perhaps higher. You know how the market reacts to unpleasant rumours. The first adverse thing that was written against us in the Press was the fact that free fighting had taken place at our meeting. That caused people to think. And the questions Jefferson asked—they brought forth the answers he required. On paper they looked bad. Yet Mosenthal was right in what he had done. Mosenthal's always right."

"You're not shouldering the blame for it all?" Hugh asked, a crooked smile on his lips.

"Shouldering it, Hugh? Well—I'm partly responsible, you know. I took a strong line at the time. I suppose my resignation would have looked bad, too. It would have caused comment. Yes, I put Mosenthal in an awkward position, as I see it now."

"But why—if Mosenthal was so sure—didn't he pay the five thousand pounds himself? He could afford it."

Marling drummed his fingers impatiently on his desk.

"I don't know," he said. "And not a question I could very well raise. It was a business affair. It was a 'Combine' matter entirely." Then he added, "I learn every day, Hugh. One day, I hope—I'll understand."

"What?"

"Life," Marling answered. "Life—as it is to-day."

"You speak as if it were an entirely new world, Dad."

"It is—almost," he answered, that far-away look coming again into his eyes.

The telephone bell rang. Again Marling reached for it.

"Hello," he said, wearily. "Who's that? Oh, you—Henry. What? You've seen it? Oh? Well, we can't discuss it on the telephone. No. No. There's not an atom of truth in it! I really can't discuss it now. I'll see you later. Yes. Thank you."

"Uncle Henry?" Hugh asked, as Marling replaced the receiver.

"Yes."

"He knows? How?"

Marling again passed his hand across his forehead.

"Really, Hugh—I think I'll go down to the city straight away."

"I should, Dad."

Marling rose from his desk.

"Come and see me soon," he said. "You and Barbara haven't dined with me for so long. Perhaps it's quiet for her—just dining. We might go and see a play."

"No, Dad—she'd much rather stay in with you," Hugh said, walking over to his father. "*Of course* she doesn't find it quiet! Also, she's rather run down just now. It's better for her not to go out."

"When shall we say, then?" Marling asked. "I'm free every night till I go away. I suppose you couldn't —to-morrow?"

Hugh thought.

"I'd better ring you," he said. "I don't know what Barbara's arranged."

"Very well," Marling said, fingering his top-hat. "Hope you can manage it."

At the door:

"I don't know whether it's quite the thing to do, or whether you'll have an opportunity, Dad. But I'd like you to express my indignation to Mosenthal. I'm exceedingly sorry for him. But, of course—it will all blow over."

"Thank you, Son. I hope so. Are you coming too?"

"Yes—we'll walk down together."

Hugh saw his father into a taxi. Mutual waves and Hugh was walking northwards to Dover Street.

Poor old Christopher! This news seemed to have upset him very much. Not very pleasant to have one's colleague attacked in a rag like *John Citizen*. It was not good for the old chap to be worried, either. And really, if Hugh thought about it—it was curious that his father should suddenly take up so many outside interests. He had been elected to two large Boards since Hugh had been home. It couldn't be for the money, for the Director's fees could not amount to very much. And there was no necessity for Old Christopher to be concerned over money, anyway. He was worth a hundred thousand, he had confided. And knowing Old Christopher, he might very well be worth more than that. Hugh crossed Piccadilly and into Dover Street. On the bookstall of the tube station he saw copies of *John Citizen* displayed. . . .

He came suddenly to Antoine's. . . . He had no definite plan in mind. This Mosenthal business had occupied his thoughts for the last hour. . . . He went inside.

"I want to see Madame Antoine," he said to an attractive girl in a black dress, who moved gracefully towards him.

"Is it—business?" the fair girl asked.

"Well—I suppose it is," Hugh answered. "My name is Marling."

"Oh—I see. Will you wait a moment, please?"

Hugh looked around him as he stood, bowler hat in hand. Diaphanous dresses were on all sides. Small hats stood on long stands. Mirrors surrounded the room. Small gilt chairs were dotted here and there. Expensive rugs lay on the parquet flooring. One wall was a cupboard in itself and through its glass doors were—what seemed to Hugh—hundreds of dresses suspended on hangers. The table in the centre of the room was decorated with a large bowl of roses. Roses stood also in a smaller vase on a walnut writing-desk in the corner.

The fair girl in the black dress returned.

"Will you come this way, please?" she smiled.

Hugh followed—to a room at the far end, which was concealed behind a black velvet curtain. Madame Antoine arose.

"I always feel," she said, smiling graciously, "that men hate to stand about in the showroom. I gathered you wanted to see me."

"Your account . . ." Hugh began, taking the chair that was offered to him.

"I thought," Madame Antoine laughed, "that you had come about the mink coat. I assure you, Mr. Marling, that Madame is entirely wrong. The coat has been damaged since she bought it. We would never sell a coat—especially to Mrs. Marling—with a flaw like that."

"I'm afraid," Hugh said, "I am not very well up in furs. My wife has complained to me about it—but, frankly, it does not seem to show at all."

"I wish my customers were all men!" Madame Antoine laughed.

"Oh—I daresay tailors would reverse the position!" Hugh said. And then—"But your account, Madame Antoine. I am extremely sorry that there has been this delay. I would have answered your letter before, but you sent it to my chambers and, as you know, it's the long vacation now. It was quite by chance that I found it to-day. I happened to go down."

"Oh—I wrote that before I received Madame's cheque," she answered. "I hope I didn't put it too strongly! But these small businesses, you know. . . ."

"Cheque—when?"

"Let me see—when did it come? Last week sometime."

"My wife has—paid?"

"Oh yes. She's had the receipt."

"I see," Hugh said. And then, for nothing better to say, he said: "It's hot, isn't it?"

"Terribly," Madame Antoine replied. "It's awful to have to remain in London."

"It must be. I mean—it is."

Hugh rose.

"And how is Madame?"

"Oh—she's feeling the heat a bit, you know."

"She's a very lovely woman and we love dressing her. She does us such credit. She makes the simplest frock look like a Paris model. She has been very kind to us," Madame Antoine added. "I don't think she knows it, though, but people *will* follow her. We're always having women come in for a dress like Mrs. Marling wore at such-and-such a place!"

"Is that so?" And Hugh was trying to back out through the velvet curtains.

"Ah—this way! Allow me," and the curtains were parted for him.

"Good day, Mr. Marling. I hope you will find Madame better. Tell her, if you will, that we shall be having some new models in next week."

"Yes," Hugh said, "I will."

Madame Antoine stood by the parted curtains and smiled again, most graciously. The fair girl in the black dress held open the glass entrance door.

"Good afternoon, sir," and she smiled, too.

"Good afternoon."

Hugh was once more on the sun-baked pavements of Dover Street. . . . And Barbara had paid the bill. . . . Five hundred pounds!

He hailed the first taxi and drove to Smith Square. The

sun was playing on the other side of the Square when he arrived, giving his house a welcome respite in the shade. He went straight up to the drawing-room. Barbara lay on the Italian sofa, a book in her hand. She glanced over the top as Hugh entered.

"Hello," she said, and returned to her book.

"Barbara—you've paid Antoine's bill—how?"

"Oh—that. Does that matter?—it's paid."

"You didn't go to O.C.?"

"After all your talk! As if I should!"

"Then where did you get it?"

"Don't stand over me like a prizefighter! It's too hot to argue, anyway." And she returned once more to her book.

"I'm going to know where you got it!" Hugh said, still standing.

"Instead of being grateful that I've paid it—you start ramping like a lion! Is there *no* pleasing you?"

Hugh sat quickly on the fender stool beside her.

"Barbara!" he said. "Where did you get it?"

Barbara put her book down and looked at him.

"How were *you* going to pay it?" she asked. "You know you haven't got the money."

"That's my business," he said.

"No! It's mine, too. How were you?"

"Sell things—pawn them."

"What?"

"The few things I've got. Then I thought your pearls . . ."

"Oh, did you!"

"After all—the bill had to be paid. You bought the coat, knowing we hadn't the money."

"That argument's—dead," she said. "So your bright solution was to pawn my jewellery! A useful little bread-winner, aren't you?"

Hugh's eyes blazed.

"Have you no thoughts for my feelings?" he said. "Do you think I like the idea of my wife pawning her jewellery?"

"It didn't seem to worry you much, I must say! Frankly,

the idea had never occurred to me, Hugh," and Barbara looked at him squarely.

"Sometimes, Barbara, you drive me mad!"

"And sometimes, Hugh, your clumsiness drives me insane. A pretty sight, I must say—Christopher Marling's only son trooping off to the pawnbroker with his wife's jewellery under his arm! I'm sure those things never happened—traditionally—in your family."

"Barbara!"

"You look dreadfully like Henry Ainley in his dramatic moments. Is that put on—specially?"

"Will you be serious?" Hugh said, heatedly.

"I'm not particularly anxious to be—No."

"There are times . . ."

"Yes—there are times—yes! There are times when we get on each other's nerves till we could scream. I know it. Why rub it in? Why not an armed neutrality? You're perspiring and it's rather unattractive to look at. I don't want to get the same way. Go downstairs and get yourself a drink."

"You'll answer my question! Where did you get the money to pay Antoine's bill? If it *was* the O.C. I'll never forgive you."

"So I'm lying, am I? I've already told you once that nothing on God's earth would make me go to the O.C. I've had enough of his damned pompousness! I'd sooner starve!"

"You're talking nonsense—and what you're saying offends me. You're saying it specially—because you know it hurts. I'll be obliged if you won't speak that way!"

"Oh—go downstairs and get yourself a drink! I've got a good book here and I want to read it."

Hugh snatched the book from her hands and flung it across the room.

"I'll stand a lot, Barbara, but there are limits!"

"Fetch that book back!"

Hugh took her fiercely by the shoulders.

"Barbara!" he said. "You and I will not leave this room until you have answered my question!"

Barbara returned his gaze—steadily.

"Will you fetch that book back?" she asked again.

"No!"

"Then I'll not answer your question!"

"Very well," and Hugh left her, walked over to the door and locked it. Then he placed the key in his waistcoat pocket.

Barbara rose languidly from the couch and walked to the windows.

"Suppose I said it was my father," she said. "You'd look rather a fool—wouldn't you?"

Hugh bit his thumb-nail thoughtfully.

"Is it?" he asked.

"I'm not going to tell you," she answered. And then: "Such an exhibition of raving I've seldom seen!"

"But Barbara—listen! Why couldn't you have told me before? Don't you see—I'm left absolutely in the dark? That's the way you treat me over everything. You don't give me a chance. If only I'd known about the General! Don't you see that I *ought* to have been told? After all, it's a lot of money and he can't afford it. I mean, it's a pretty big thing for him to do. And you don't tell me! Our whole domestic life, Barbara, seems to be going to hell, in the same way. You're so unreasonable. You never give either of us a chance. I know you're not well just now, but it dates back long before that. You flare up at the slightest thing. You're not interested in what I do—or how I feel. You never give a thought as to whether *I* want to do a thing. If I'm to be with you—I must just follow blindly. If I don't, then I'm being dull—and I'm left behind. You never take me into your confidence—you never share things with me. It's sad, Barbara. It's terribly sad. We used to be so happy. We used to do everything together until you got embroiled in all this wretched London life. Now I never see you. I don't believe we've had six meals alone in this house in the last year. And the position's getting worse. I adore you—you know it. I'll always adore you. That's because one can't forget what has gone before. We've known the most intense happiness together, Bar-

bara—and you can't obliterate that. That's why it's so sad to see how things are drifting. If only you'd be a little more thoughtful all this wouldn't happen. When I came in the room just now you might have hated the sight of me from the way you looked at me. Don't you see? Those things start us off all wrong. And this bill of Antoine's. If only you'd discussed it with me and told me what you intended doing. We could have worked it out together then. Instead, I'm left absolutely in the dark. I find a letter from Antoine's waiting for me in my chambers. I devise ways and means. I go to see her. It makes me look such a fool!"

"Oh—I see. That's what's rankling!"

Hugh walked up to Barbara as she stood with her back towards him.

"Barbara," he said, more gently, taking her by the shoulders again. "There you go again! You know perfectly well that isn't the reason. You do—don't you?"

Barbara yawned.

"I suppose I do," she answered.

"Then—why?"

"You will always *analyse*!" she said. "It's so tiresome. Why do we do—anything?"

"Barbara!"

"Yes?"

"Let's dine together to-night. Let's try and get things right again."

"Aren't the Calthorpes coming in to play poker?"

"I don't know—are they? Let's put them off, anyway."

"All right," Barbara answered, after a pause, "if you want to."

"I'll pick up the book now," Hugh whispered into her ear. "Shall I?"

Barbara turned.

"Oh—yes. The book. Yes, pick it up."

"I'm sorry I was a bit angry just now."

"You were rather unpleasant!"

"And you were hardly—well, in the best of tempers, were you, Sweet?"

"No," she said.

"Barbara—turn round!"

She obeyed.

"Let's drink a bottle of *Lanson* at dinner. You remember the first time we drank that?"

"I suppose I do—when?"

"You know—at the Ivy."

"That's rather vague, when we've been there so often."

"There you go again!"

"You're so terribly enthusiastic about everything, Hugh!"

"I know. If things mean anything—I can't help it. But let's drink *Lanson* again to-night, Barbara," and a crooked smile played on his lips. "Shall we?"

"Well—go and bath, meantime. You're looking revoltingly hot."

Hugh walked over and picked up the book. He still seemed unsatisfied. He glanced over at Barbara's back as he walked over to the door and unlocked it.

"I say," he said, "about the General. It's damned good of him, Barbara, to help us out. Especially when he can't afford it. We'll pay him back, of course. We can't accept all that from him."

"I shouldn't worry," Barbara said airily.

"But of course!" Hugh replied. "I'll write him to-night. It's damned good of him."

Barbara turned.

"No you won't," she said calmly. "You'll leave it to me. It's my affair."

"But I can't let him do a thing like this without a word from me. *Of course*, I must write to him."

"You won't!"

Hugh walked over to her again.

"Barbara—why?"

She looked at him.

"Because he didn't give it to me," she answered, deliberately.

Hugh stared at her.

"Then who did?"

"Bertie."

For a moment Hugh seemed unable to speak.

"*You allowed Bertie to pay my bills!*" he stammered, a moment later.

"Well, you hadn't a hope of paying them," Barbara said. "Bertie could. That's the difference."

"My God!"

"Leave my wrists alone! You're hurting!"

"So you allowed Bertie to pay my bills! Have you no sense of honour or decency?"

"Are you aware that you're hurting my wrists? Leave go!"

"I'll not leave go till I've said what I'm going to say!"

"*Leave go!* Hugh—I'll scream! Jolly for the neighbours to know that Hugh Marling bullies his wife, wouldn't it be? Will you let me go!"

"You'll send that money back, Barbara, as soon as I can raise it. You'll write a letter in your own hand, at my dictation. And when you've written it, you'll remove Bertie Raynes from your visiting list. Men who give my wife money behind my back are not men that I welcome to my house. That, you will understand clearly. And if it even comes to selling your pearls to do it—I'll sell them! If it comes to selling everything we've got—I'll sell it. You've played at life for long enough now, Barbara. You're becoming engrossed in your own selfishness. You're going to learn that other people, and other people's feelings, exist in this world, too. And once you've learnt that lesson you'll become a decent member of society! I've suffered enough at your hands. I've allowed myself to forget nearly every instinct that is in me to satisfy your whims. But there are some that I will not forget. Men do not pay my wife's bills—unknown to me. And my wife does not accept such money without telling me. I'm beginning to see things now in their proper perspective. I've loved you too well, Barbara. I've allowed you to use me as if I were some toy to be pulled out of a cupboard when I would satisfy a mood. I've allowed you to trample on my feelings—to kill every enthusiasm that is in me until I am reduced to some weakling without strength even to complain. That is

what you have done to me. But that is not what you will do to me—in the future. Your lack of essentials terrifies me to an extent that I intend to put your house in order right away. We will begin by selling those pearls!" he said, snatching them brutally from her neck.

The string broke. Barbara glared at him—stupefied. Suddenly she slapped his face.

Hugh, stunned for a moment by its suddenness, looked up to find himself alone, a broken string of pearls in his hand.

CHAPTER XVI

CORTLAND SPEED wore always beneath his winged collar, a bow tie of spotted design. His thinning hair was parted at the side, but its fairness made that paucity less apparent. His figure was slight—boyish even. His manner precise; his sentences usually cryptic. He had been manager of the Threadneedle Street Branch of Cassells Bank for over ten years, and was regarded in the banking world as a coming man. His branch had conducted the 'Combine' account since its inception, and throughout its existence his relations with Mosenthal had been of the most cordial. They met frequently, but always in the Board-room of the Combine offices.

Cortland Speed entered the Board-room one morning in mid-September, and placed his top-hat at the far end of the Board-room table.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said, gravely.

Christopher Marling rose stiffly.

"You have been quick," Mosenthal said, already shaking Speed's hand.

Speed bowed to Marling and shook his hand also. Then the three of them sat down.

"You would like the cigar—Yes?—while we talk?"

"I do not smoke before lunch," Speed replied solemnly.

A silence followed that remark.

"Well—and what is the news, Mr. Speed?" Mosenthal asked, his chubby hands before him.

Speed adjusted his cuffs.

"I'm afraid," he said, "my directors will need further security."

"But why do they ask that? The position is good to-day—it is better. Next month it will be better still."

"You'll understand, I know," Speed said, after another pause, "if I speak bluntly."

"It is better—yes," and Mosenthal was leaning nearer to him across the end of the Board-room table.

"There have been rumours—unfounded, I feel sure. Nevertheless, my directors have heard of them. These unfortunate articles in *John Citizen*. . . ."

"Ah—those are unfortunate—yes! But what are they? The outcome of some spite that is levelled against me. Soon the matter will be righted and big compensation will be paid to me."

"But it looks bad at the moment, you will agree?"

"Yes—it looks bad," Mosenthal replied thoughtfully. "That is true."

"We're carrying a big overdraft. We have little security. Whilst we have every faith in your integrity, Mr. Mosenthal, there is, nevertheless, the fact to be faced that considerable mud has been thrown at you. From the Bank's point of view, the matter has not yet been sifted—the accusations have not yet been refuted." Then he looked up. "I am speaking very plainly," he said.

"Of course—it is better."

"We feel sure that you will do so, in due course."

"Of that you may rest assured."

"In the meantime, you are in rather an unfortunate position. And we, as bankers—cannot overlook that. For myself, of course. . . ."

"I understand."

"Putting the facts before you—my directors require further security. Otherwise the overdraft must be reduced."

"I see," Mosenthal said. Then with a shrug of his shoulders, "And what are the suggestions of your headquarters? For how much do they require the guarantee?"

"If, as you say," Speed replied, "you will be in a

position to pay off the overdraft by the New Year—then a further fifty thousand will be required until that time."

"Then it is guaranteed up to two-thirds of the amount?" Mosenthal said. "That, with the security of our business, is a large amount, Mr. Speed."

"I am afraid, Mr. Mosenthal—that those are the terms I am instructed to convey to you."

Mosenthal rapped a penholder on the table.

"Another fifty thousand," he said, a moment later. "I am surprised that they ask so much for so short a time."

Speed fingered his blue-and-white spotted tie.

"Those terms will be acceptable to you?" he asked. "You will find a further guarantor?"

"Oh—yes," Mosenthal replied in an off-hand manner. "That will be done."

Christopher Marling cleared his throat.

"Mr. Speed," he asked. "Failing a guarantor, I assume that your bank would accept a large holding of 'Combine' shares as security for this period?"

"I daresay that could be arranged," Speed replied. "The amount would have to be more than covered, of course—in that event."

"What would they require?"

"I should have to discuss it with my directors, of course. But let me see—fifty thousand? Perhaps to the value of seventy-five. Perhaps less. . . ."

"That is a large amount," Mosenthal put in quickly. "Surely with the security of our business they would not require so large a guarantee?"

"I will, of course, arrange the best terms I can," Speed replied, speaking with extreme civility. "You may be sure of that. My directors, however, are unfortunately adamant in that your overdraft shall be adequately covered. We already have Mr. Marling's personal guarantee for fifty thousand. A large block of 'Combine' shares in addition, should, I feel sure, meet the case. You are convinced, Mr. Mosenthal, that the overdraft will be cleared by the New Year?"

"Yes—you have seen the new contracts that we have. Our immediate obligations will have been met, too, by

that time. Our machinery will have been paid for. Then, Mr. Speed," Mosenthal added, smilingly, " our difficulties —they will have disappeared. They will not exist. We proceed then to our prosperity. We do not trouble you again with the overdraft. We conduct then, the good account at your Bank. That is good—eh ? "

" You can arrange to lodge the necessary ' Combine ' shares with us immediately ? " Speed continued. " They are, of course, entirely unencumbered ? "

Mosenthal looked up quickly.

" There are no calls on the shares we would lodge with you," he said, " That is obvious ! "

" How many would your directors require ? " Marling asked.

Speed sat thoughtfully for a moment.

" What I am going to say is, of course, entirely unofficial," he said. " On the market value to-day—I should say sixteen thousand. But, of course, as I say—that is entirely unofficial."

Mosenthal made a rapid calculation on the blotting-paper before him.

" But that represents about eighty thousand pounds ! "

" I think I mentioned," Speed replied, " that they would require to be covered for more than the amount."

" I see," Mosenthal said at last. " Perhaps you will leave this matter with us then, Mr. Speed. Then perhaps you will let me know what your directors decide. I shall be here—in my office—for the remainder of the day. Or if not to-day—I am at the Watling Investment Trust all to-morrow morning."

Cortland Speed rose from the table.

" I hope to have news for you by early afternoon," he said. " I am on my way to Head Office now."

The three of them were standing once more. Cortland Speed walked to the other end of the Board-room table and picked up his top-hat.

" If I can arrange better terms," he said, " you may rely upon me."

" Thank you," Mosenthal said, by the door.

" Good day ! "

"Good day!"

Mosenthal closed the door silently.

"Well, my friend—what do you say?"

Christopher Marling fingered his stock.

"There seems no option," he said.

"I am surprised they adopt this attitude," Mosenthal continued, walking back to the table, a frown on his forehead. "With the assets we possess—the position we hold—it does not seem necessary."

"Sixteen thousand shares," Marling said. "It seems a bit heavy."

Mosenthal shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, my friend," he said, as if resigned to the position, "we must see to it then. For myself I am willing to lodge half the amount, if you will do the same."

Marling turned suddenly in his walk towards the window.

"Eight thousand each?" he asked.

"That is so. What does it mean, anyway? It is a matter only of form."

"I'm already guaranteeing fifty thousand, Mosenthal!"

"For myself," Mosenthal laughed, "I am guaranteeing far more than that—on my other undertakings! There have been times, my friend, when I have had over a million pounds tied up in this way. What is it? And our future so rosy? Come with me, my friend. Let us examine the position together in my office." Then gripping Marling's arm with a suddenness, "We do better when we think together! That is so—eh? And to-day I have some further information for you. A cable from Rio. . . ."

And Bernher, as he entered by the other door, caught only the end of this conversation—for they were already in Mosenthal's office and that door had closed, too.

CHAPTER XVII

BY the end of September the rain had fallen. Like a cool draught the feverish earth devoured it, though it made but little impression upon its crusted tongue. But the coolness it brought gave comfort to a tired world and

refreshed it. Like a wilting bloom that rises in its bowl as it is freshly watered, so did the population of London respond to its first breeze—the first sight of the falling rain.

For Marling, who had put off his visit to the Barlows' shoot at the last moment owing to the difficulties of the 'Combine' situation, it had been a most welcome relief, for the summer of 1921 had been the most trying that he had remembered during his sixty-seven years. But he had confided his worries to no man. By the middle of October, however, the shares had dropped to three and seven-eighths. There seemed no apparent reason for it; the factories were now working at full pressure to fulfil their contracts for the New Year; from the outsider's point of view, things were in a flourishing condition; from the Board's point of view, their future was a matter upon which they could sincerely congratulate themselves. . . . Yet the shares were still falling. And with the fall in their price, so had the question of the Company's overdraft become more acute. Already Cortland Speed had demanded further cover. To this Marling had definitely expressed his inability to help; he could do no more. The guarantee for which he was now responsible represented already nearly ninety thousand pounds—at least, it had done when he had agreed to act jointly with Mosenthal not a month before. Mosenthal had, therefore, after a lengthy argument, found the necessary securities himself. But still the shares were falling. . . .

The articles in *John Citizen* had ceased, following an injunction. But the damage had already been done. Mosenthal was taking the matter further and intended to fight them tooth and nail. Behind his attitude was a venom such as Marling had rarely seen. And yet it was Marling who had insisted upon this action being taken. Mosenthal had felt inclined to ignore it. What good was there in stirring up further mud? But Marling had been firm; Mosenthal's honour had been attacked; one could not sit down under such inferences; his good name had to be cleared at the first possible moment.

And all the time Marling realized that a first-class commercial blunder had been made in the stand he had advised

against Jefferson. Whilst he thoroughly deprecated these practices, he saw now that such things existed. Share-pushing? What was it? In the old days he would have regarded it as dishonest. To-day, he saw that big finance was but a game of chess—the pawns in the game being quickly taken. The fight in life was to checkmate your biggest opponent. And the pawns were the willing parties who would contribute to your scheme. They were important, as the pawns in the game of chess were important. More so, perhaps, in that they played a large part by contributing of their wealth—resulting in a gradual rise in the price of the shares—which kept continued confidence with the public. And the business of a company promoter was firstly to keep faith with his public. It was not a question of selfish interests; the interest of every shareholder was at stake. To allow anything, therefore, to creep into Mosenthal's scheme and, by becoming public property, lessen the value of the commodity he was offering, was injurious to his company. Marling saw that now. And he, Christopher Marling, had contributed largely to the present injury. If he had not gone to the lengths of threatening his resignation there would have been no question but that Mosenthal would have paid the five thousand pounds himself. The trouble would never have started then. But at that time even the resignation of a director would have been injurious, for the city searches out the truth of these things—in spite of the usual 'ill-health' reasons that are common in such cases.

So it was that Marling now felt it incumbent upon him to straighten matters as far as he was able, and to this end he had lodged securities with the Threadneedle Street Branch of Cassells Bank, amounting to nearly ninety thousand pounds. That represented apart from a few thousand shares in other stock, the entire savings of his lifetime.

But he was, in spite of his apparent unconcern, feeling considerably ill at ease. The continual fall of the shares was worrying in the extreme. Of course, he still shared with Mosenthal that enthusiasm for the future of the 'Combine.' But the continual fall seemed to be causing a general loss of confidence in the market. He was beginning to feel

uncomfortable when he entered his club. Always Clements was sitting there, and always he hobbled over to glean the latest information.

"What *is* the position, Marling? What's the reason for it?" and always Clements wore a troubled expression.

Of course, Marling had appeased him. But as Clements had said—"I'd get out now if I could. But I can't afford to. It would mean a lot to me to lose all that."

"In the New Year, my boy," Marling had said, "things will be looking up. Big things happening in the New Year."

"Well, if you say so, Marling. . . ."

But then, what else could he say? He had a loyalty to the company he served. He had a loyalty also to his friends. Besides he, as a member of that Board with all the information at his disposal, could not help regarding the future with every confidence. The only thing that troubled him was the continual fall of the shares. For that he could see no reason. A reaction after the many attacks that had been made upon Mosenthal's policy following the meeting, was natural. A reaction, too, after those wretched articles had appeared in *John Citizen*. But a continual falling was not justified. Marling could see no justification for it whatsoever. The shares of the other companies who remained outside the 'Combine' were stationary. Marling studied the markets religiously each day and read all that could be read of the Industry generally. In some cases their competitors' shares were even rising. . . .

Dr. Simpson was adamant; Marling must go away before the winter. He had had a nasty bout last winter and he must build himself up to face the dangers of the coming one. After a summer such as this we could expect a winter of extreme cold. Those things went usually together. He really must go away. . . . But Marling had remained near at hand.

"Can't understand it," Greville had said one day. "There's heavy selling all round. It beats me, Marling. The show's never been in a sounder position, either. After all—results are all that matter. The stuff the papers put over doesn't cut much ice now. It's all forgotten."

"But *John Citizen*!"

"Oh—that! Well, who takes any notice of that rag, anyway?"

But Greville, too, looked anxious. No longer did he say "They'll be ten before the year's out. Mark my words!" He had not said that for some long time now. And he seemed to be losing touch with Mosenthal, too.

"Business is slacking off in that direction," Greville had said on one occasion. "Usually he was buying a few 'Combines'—if nothing else. But I haven't had an order for some time. I've not upset him in any way—that you know of?"

"No. I've heard of nothing," Marling had replied.

"Curious! Often he can't see me, too, when I call. He didn't used to do that."

"He's very busy," Marling had put in. "His responsibilities are growing, too. They say he'll do the issue of this new Hungarian Loan that's being discussed."

"I hope so," Greville had replied. "I find business slacking off generally. I could do with some of the underwriting. He always does me well—when he can. At least, he did."

"You're like all of us," Marling had said cheerfully, "the heat's got you down a bit. Never seen you depressed before, Greville."

"Well—they talk of next year not being too good," Greville had replied. "I was talking to Henry Barlow the other night. He's a pessimistic devil, anyway. But he says we've reached the end of the boom period and the world's over-produced. He seems to think there's going to be a settling down soon—and it's going to be with a bump."

"Henry always takes the worst possible view," Marling had said. "Most bankers do—if it comes to that."

"Well—remind old Mosy I'm still on the map when you see him," and he had left Greville sitting at his desk—unconsciously drawing diagrams on his blotting-pad with a blue pencil.

Yes—Greville seemed to have lost his usual buoyancy. It had been much more noticeable these last few weeks.

And Marling was feeling off-colour, too. Much as he would deny it to Simpson, he had needed that month in Scotland. When he received an urgent message from Mosenthal to come down to Dorchester House one morning in the middle of October, he found himself irritated by the summons.

The girl who sat at the switchboard looked up as he entered through the swing doors.

"Mr. Mosenthal is waiting for you in his office," she said, "will you go through?"

He found Mosenthal pacing the floor.

"The shares this morning—you have seen? They opened at under three! *Under three!*"

Marling put his top-hat on the chair by the door.

"Mosenthal," he said, "this is serious."

"It is, as you say—serious! Now the bank—they will come down on us again! Oh—it is the annoying thing! It makes me mad to be so inconvenienced! For ever we are satisfying the bank as if we were some humble undertaking without the capital or the standing! Never have I been placed in so invidious a position. But this morning, we shall hear from them again! You will see. Mr. Speed he will be here for some further guarantee. It is not a matter for which I blame him—that is his business. But to haggle over such things! And where, I ask myself—do I turn now? I—Richard Mosenthal—ask myself where I shall turn for a few thousand pounds! It is too incongruous!"

"Well, let's sit down," Marling said, "and consider the matter."

"When I am worried, my friend, I walk about. I do not sit down!"

Christopher Marling solemnly took the chair that faced Mosenthal's desk. "How much do you consider they will need?" he asked, ill at ease.

"I do not know. How should I know? The position is that, for myself, I can find no more. By the New Year—yes—it would be a different matter then. But to-day, my capital is tied up so that it cannot be disturbed."

"But surely, Mosenthal, with your immense holdings

elsewhere, you should have no difficulty? The Watling Investment Trust, for example. That's one of the most flourishing in the city. Surely there are ways. . . ."

"Do you think, my friend, that I would concern myself if it were as easy as that? In my business I have to rob Peter to pay Paul. I have to adjust here and adjust there. There is a continual movement of capital—a movement that goes on all the time. At this moment, I tell you, I find it most inconvenient to raise any floating capital to use for this purpose. Of my many undertakings—you know them all. Business it is not good—all round. I have had to pay out large sums during the last few months. When I use the word 'large' it is, of course, a comparative expression. But I tell you that I find it most inconvenient at this moment, to put up a further guarantee. It may sound strange to you, Mr. Marling, but nevertheless, that is the case." With that he paused by the desk and took a Russian cigarette from the gold box that lay by the side of his ink-stand.

Marling stroked his chin.

"What is the reason for this heavy fall?" he asked.

"If I knew the answer to that, my friend, would I stand by and allow it to go on? There is selling, my friend. There is heavy selling."

"From where?"

"Again I say, if I knew—then I would be the wiser. I would devise the ways."

"Surely bottom has been reached?"

"You have used that expression to me, my friend, when the shares stood as high as five."

"You speak, Mosenthal, as if you are losing confidence," Marling said quickly.

Mosenthal stopped in his walk.

"Me! Lose confidence! This business, my friend, will *begin* in the New Year! Such things as we have done already are as nothing beside what we shall do then! But who can quickly step in and save a falling market? It is only big buying of the shares that can do that. And at this moment—that I cannot do. But something, my friend, must be done. We cannot allow the headlines in

the Financial columns to continue. I am tired of seeing the words 'Combines weaker.' After all the work I have put into this business—the time I have devoted to it!" And as Mosenthal paced the floor angrily he stamped his feet on the Turkey carpet like some spoilt child, his hands behind his back, a Russian cigarette hanging loosely from the corner of his mouth.

Marling watched him. Like some caged tiger, he thought. His round shoulders seemed to-day more sloping; his sallow complexion more yellow. He was unpleasantly unattractive, Marling thought. Repulsive, almost. His underlip was heavy and sensual; his face now ape-like and hideous. And yet that face could light into the most engaging smile; those nicotined fingers, held now behind his back, could play Bach as Marling had never heard it played. His personality, often so aggressive, could be almost childlike in its simplicity. For Marling he was a complete enigma. It was because he could never fathom the complexities of that nature that it held him. Were Mosenthal an Englishman of normal temperament, Marling realized that he might have had, perhaps, even a dislike for him. Perhaps, even, a mistrust. He was essentially of the people; he belonged in no way to the life that was Marling's. And yet the artistic side of Mosenthal's nature fascinated. Like so many foreigners, he was a lively conversationalist, the light and shade of his nature adding to the interest of his story. Together they had spent many evenings, and always Marling had been enchanted in his company. At the opera especially, when they would return afterwards to Lancaster Gate and Mosenthal would play excerpts to him in the soft lights of his drawing-room. And when he had finished one evening he had risen from the piano stool and said:—"My friend, to play to you—it is a pleasure. You and I, we may not see always eye to eye. But then we have in common this great bond. It is the love of music. It is as great as the love of children. Those two things they constitute the basis of an understanding between us—a mutual sympathy that I enjoy. For myself I have no children. But then—I contribute largely to their hospitals. I visit them often when I find

the time. On Sundays I am often there. They are, to me, one of my dearest pleasures. And you, my friend, you have your Hugh. I, too, regard him as a son of mine. He has great enthusiasm. For that I envy you." And presently he had produced some piece of china that he had recently bought and had become ecstatic over its beauty, fondling it lovingly, talking to it almost. . . .

And this same man, lovable to an extent that Marling found difficult to understand, was now pacing the floor of his office as one insane. His untidy clothes covered with cigarette ash and stains, the few wisps of hair that covered his bald head, dishevelled and straggling.

"I am afraid I can do no more," Marling said presently. "If I could—of course. . . ."

"My friend, let us consider! To go outside the 'Combine' is a bad thing for us to do. To-day I am tempted to speak to Sir John. It is a thing that I do not like to do. But then, I regard him as one of the 'Combine' family—and for that it does not matter. But Sir John, I find, is out of town. Already I have rung up his office."

"There must be many who would come forward," Marling said.

"That is so—yes. But we want the right man, Mr. Marling. We do not wish the matter to get about."

Marling looked at his boots, highly polished and boned; his neat feet together.

"I am afraid," he said, "that you are in a better position to know where to turn than I."

"I have been thinking," Mosenthal answered quickly, pausing by the fireplace, "your brother-in-law, Henry Barlow. Perhaps he would do it for us? He is, of course, a man of unquestionable standing. He is, too, a relation to you. He would, therefore, treat the matter most confidentially."

Marling looked up from his polished boots.

"I don't like asking him," he said. "Never asked him a favour yet."

"Then is not that a good omen?" Mosenthal asked, his lined face relaxing.

The telephone rang. Mosenthal walked back to his desk.

"Hello," he said. "Ah—Mr. Speed! With pleasure. At any time you wish. Right away. Very good—yes, in ten minutes."

"You see," Mosenthal said, smilingly, as he put down the instrument, "Mr. Speed, he does not waste the time!" Then returning to his position by the fireplace, he said gravely: "And you do not think that Henry Barlow would do this small thing for us?"

Marling rose.

"I'll ask him," he said.

In a few moments Marling was walking towards Lombard Street.

"Ah—Henry! Nice of you to spare me the time."

Henry Barlow, urbane and smiling, proffered his cigars. His pink cheeks possessed a healthy glow derived from a month on the Scottish moors. Marling contrasted the neatness of his linen with that of Mosenthal's—the correct tidiness of his clothing, even to the white bands that were either side of the opening of his waistcoat.

Christopher Marling explained his mission; Henry Barlow listened intently.

"I see," Barlow said, when Marling had finished. "Why can't Mosenthal arrange it himself? It sounds simple enough."

Again Marling explained, while Henry Barlow fingered his cigar.

"Look here, Christopher," he said. "There are unpleasant rumours going about. You know of them, of course. They don't sound too good. People are talking."

"About what? The wretched papers had a lot to say, Henry, I grant you that. But the business has never looked better. The future's assured as far as I can see. There's no risk in it."

"Christopher," he replied, "there are times when I wish you'd kept to your Law. In your place, I'd resign now. That's the best advice I can give you."

"Resign! Leave a sinking ship!"

"I'm telling you," Henry repeated.

The colour rose again to Marling's cheek. . . . This damned pompousness! . . . Henry sitting there fat and

bloated . . . always knowing too much . . . always so damned condescending.

"Besides," Marling added, quickly, "the ship's not sinking, Henry. I'd like you to know that. It's far from sinking!"

"Caught in the Doldrums?" Henry asked.

"However you like to put it," Marling snapped. "But far from sinking!"

"I see."

Marling found himself intensely irritated. Henry had always this effect upon him. Even now he was sitting back in his chair, a supercilious smile on his lips. . . . A look in his eyes that seemed to contain the knowledge of the entire world.

"If it were a question of yourself," Henry continued, "I would be delighted to accommodate you."

"Damned good of you!" Marling snapped again. "But it is not a habit of mine—to borrow!"

"I see—well, it isn't mine either. Nor is it a custom of my Bank, Christopher, to finance Mosenthal's undertakings. We've never touched him—here."

"I was not suggesting that the Bank should!"

"Oh," Barlow said, with raised eyebrows, "then you mean that *I*, personally, should act?"

Marling did not answer.

"In that case, Christopher—I am afraid I cannot help you. In my position as a banker, I could not be intimately associated to-day with our mutual friend. The Bank have never touched him. Nor will I."

"Are you suggesting . . .?"

"I suggest nothing. Some people do business with him. . . ."

"And you would have been pleased enough to have done so before these libellous attacks were made upon him!"

"We have never had any business relations with Richard Mosenthal," Henry repeated, expansively.

"You were anxious enough to know him in the past!"

"I am not particularly anxious to know him to-day."

Marling rose to his feet.

"Henry," he said, "in the whole of my life I have only asked one favour of you. It will be my last!"

"Putting it like that, Christopher, you make me feel most uncomfortable."

"You needn't be!"

Henry Barlow was on his feet, too.

"Look here, Christopher. Let me put it another way: Let me lend it to you. You can do it in your own name then. If it's a question of money, of course—between you and me, Christopher. . . ."

"Thank you! I'll be obliged if you will forget that this conversation has ever taken place!"

And before Henry could speak further, Christopher Marling had picked up his hat and had left his office.

* * * * *

Later that afternoon the matter was arranged to the Bank's satisfaction. Richard Mosenthal and Christopher Marling jointly agreed that three thousand shares belonging to each of them—and already lodged with the Bank—should be sold to reduce the overdraft. For Richard Mosenthal it was a matter of extreme annoyance. For Christopher Marling, it was a question of honour.

CHAPTER XVIII

EVENTS moved rapidly within the next twenty-four hours. Before the Stock Exchange closed that evening, Greville rang up.

"They're down to two and a quarter!" he said.

"Oh!"

"I had an order to sell six thousand this afternoon. Instructions not to sell below two and *three*-quarters."

"Where from?"

"One of the banks."

"Which one?"

"No one about?—Cassells."

"Oh." Then: "Did you get the price?"

"No. So didn't get the order."

A pause.

"I see."

"But there's heavy selling somewhere, Marling. Can't make it out at all. Sickening, losing the order, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Must have been."

"By the way, Home Rails are up a bit."

"Good! Nothing more?"

"No, thought you'd like to know. A dreadful price isn't it? Still—they can't go much lower."

"No."

"Will you be looking in at the club?"

"Maybe, Greville. About seven—if I do."

"Right."

Then Marling rang off. . . . Things looked bad! Another drop of ten shillings since the morning and the Bank had not sold those shares. . . . Perhaps he'd better ring up Mosenthal . . . but no, it was better to discuss these things privately. . . . He'd look in at Lancaster Gate after dinner. . . . And what was the position if the Bank did not sell? . . . Further guarantees, he supposed. . . . Marling rose from his desk and paced the strip of carpet in front of it.

The telephone rang.

"Lord Ewart to see you, sir."

"Show him in!"

Marling returned to his desk, where he stood for a moment. Then the door opened and his visitor entered.

"Ah—Ewart!"

"Just passing, Marling. Thought I'd look in."

"Nice to see you, Ewart. Nice to see you."

Their hands met.

Marling resumed his seat; Lord Ewart took the chair opposite to him.

"It's good to be cool again—eh, Marling?" Ewart said, removing his gloves.

"It is—deucedly good. Found it very trying—that heat."

"We all did. For myself, I'm not so young as I was, Marling. My heart, you know, didn't care about it at

all! Found it difficult to breathe sometimes. Not a breath of air about anywhere."

"You'll have to go easy," Marling advised, leaning back in his chair.

"You're looking a bit done up yourself," Ewart replied. "You haven't been away, have you?"

"No—not yet."

"Bad that! Can't do without holidays, Marling. Not at our age."

"I'm all right," Marling replied. "Plenty to do. That keeps a man fit."

Lord Ewart, having removed both his gloves, placed them on the desk before him.

"What's the matter with 'Combines'?" he asked, suddenly.

Lord Ewart and Marling sat together on the Board of the Shield Insurance Company. It was through Lord Ewart that the offer had been made to him.

"Conditions generally," Marling replied. "Money's getting tighter, too. Of course, these wretched news-papers. . . ."

"Yes—yes. There's been a lot of mud thrown there. Why is it?" he asked.

"In our lives, Ewart," Marling said, "we've seen many successful men attacked. That's one of the drawbacks of being successful. It goes back further—into History. Even Wellington was not immune. That's the way the world treats a successful man."

"But you've always spoken most highly of Mosenthal."

"I still do."

"And you're still optimistic—about the business?"

"I am."

"The shares have had another big drop to-day."

"I know."

Lord Ewart paused for a moment when about to speak. Then, after consideration, he said: "There are rumours, of course. I thought I ought to tell you."

"The city is full of rumours, Ewart."

"I mean—rather unpleasant rumours, and, if I may say so—rather personal ones."

"Personal!—About whom?"

"The Board generally."

Marling looked up quickly.

"I don't follow," he said.

Lord Ewart leant nearer, across the desk.

"They say," he said, "that the Board are selling out their own holding as fast as they can. That's the reason for the state of the market."

"That is absurd!" Marling answered quickly.

"You've not sold any?" Ewart asked.

Marling laid his hands flat on the desk and left them there for a moment.

"That's rather a personal question, Ewart," he said. "but I'll answer it. I have, at this moment, the same holding that I had before all this trouble started."

"I'm glad," Ewart said quickly, "I'm glad to hear that. Very glad."

"Why?"

"Does it matter, Marling?" Ewart smiled. "Sufficient to know that you are holding on. I'm a big shareholder, too."

Marling looked worried.

"Why did you specifically ask—if *I* had sold? Had you any reason?"

"To be candid—I had. But we will not go into that. Public men, Marling—like successful ones—are there to be shot at."

Marling's frown grew; his forehead became suddenly lined.

"What are you insinuating?" he asked.

"Nothing, my dear fellow. But I've known you since we were at Winchester together. If ever a man gave a square deal—it was you. For one thing, I have a large interest. I am naturally anxious."

"Well, you needn't be!" Marling replied, a little sharply.

Then they fell to discussing other matters; the affairs of the Shield Insurance Company in particular. Presently Lord Ewart rose.

"Pleasant offices you've got, Marling. Restful. An atmosphere about them."

"Yes—I've been here some years now.'
"And Hugh?"
"He's doing well—very well. Fraser's most optimistic."
"Always your ambition for him—the Bar?"
"Yes," Marling answered. "I always wanted that."
"Well—I'm glad he's not disappointing you."
"He'll never do that," Marling said, as he held open the door. "He'll never do that, Ewart."

Then Lord Ewart, hat in hand, walked through the doorway with a gracious bow, and down the stairs into the street. . . . Marling returned to his desk.

This short interview with Lord Ewart troubled him further. Why had he asked specifically whether *he* had sold any of his shares? . . . If it came to that, but for this sudden drop in the price of the shares during the day, he would have been three thousand the poorer that very afternoon! . . .

Benson entered and fifteen minutes were spent in conversation with him. Claude Buxton followed. Later an interview with Lady Broadbridge and he was on his way to the club, walking thoughtfully up St. James's Street.

"Mr. Clements is asking for you, sir," Stevens volunteered, from behind his glass cubicle. "He's in the Smoking-Room."

Marling walked into the cloak-room and hung up his top-hat. Then he washed his hands carefully, as if it were a matter of the direst importance to him—examining his nails thoughtfully as he dried them. Then he walked upstairs into the Smoke-room. Clements hobbled across to meet him.

"Come into the corner, Marling," he said, awkwardly, "I am very worried."

Marling followed. . . . Old Clements seemed to be limping more than usual, his face whiter, his eyes more staring. . . . Clements took Marling's arm as they sat on the leather settee, as if holding on to him for what comfort he could give.

"Marling," he cried, "what does it all mean? For God's sake, tell me the position! The shares to-night at two and a quarter! That's nearly five thousand pounds

that I've lost. It's all I've got in the world—my holding there. I watch it falling, day after day. Marling—I can't sleep! It's getting me down! If I sell to-day I haven't enough to live on! God, man, don't you understand?"

"I do," Marling replied. "I do."

"Will it never stop?" he asked. "Can't something be done? Shortly I'll be ruined, Marling—*ruined!* At my age, where can I turn to find employment? My eyes are getting worse—I'm half blind now. My gout makes it difficult for me to get about. I can't sit still watching my savings dwindle away! If I get the market price to-night I'll not get enough to bring me in a hundred a year! What am I to do? I've followed you, Marling. I've always followed you. I look to you now. You're on the Board. You must have some idea of how things will go. Don't you see, man, I'm desperate! It's all I've got in the world!"

The strain of the last few weeks seemed to tell more on Marling at that moment than at any time before. The armour with which his emotions were controlled seemed suddenly pierced by the poignancy of the situation.

"Clements," he said, "believe me, you are the last man I would wish to see lose his capital. I have a respect for you equalled by few men. The way you enlisted when war broke out! Wonderful, Clements—truly wonderful! My respect for you has grown to a deep affection. Your financial position is only too well known to me. I never advised your buying them. . . ."

"You did! Should I have done so, otherwise?"

Marling laid his hand on Clements' arm.

"I never advised," he added, gently. "I never advise any man—I only advise on matters that are known to me, and those matters are the law. . . ."

"But—Marling! I asked you! You spoke so enthusiastically!"

"I did. I still do."

"Then what—*what* is the trouble with them? The shares dropping every day! Five thousand pounds I've lost already!"

"Dear fellow," Marling said. "I find it difficult to

answer you. I can only speak—again—of things that I know. The contracts that are being arranged should keep us working at full pressure for some years to come. That's bound to have an effect on the price of the shares. Their present slump is due to matters over which the Board can have no control. The Stock Markets are a thing apart. They react to supply and demand. At the moment, owing to the adverse criticisms which have been publicly levelled against us—the demand is not so large as it was. When business improves—as it will—and the people see that large dividends will be paid—then a demand will again be created for our shares. They will rise again, then, Clements. More I cannot tell you. Remember that I, too, have a large holding. This slump affects me, also."

"But you're independent, Marling. It isn't a matter of having enough to eat with you. That's what I'm faced with! Ninety pounds a year is all I'll have on to-night's prices. To-morrow it may be worse!"

"You're taking a bad view," Marling said. "Don't do that, old fellow. I'll help you—if things are difficult. You needn't feel awkward about that. We've known each other long enough. We all help each other over stiles. That's the fun of living at all—helping others."

"That isn't the point—though it's good of you. Where do I stand? What do I do? Sell out to-morrow and pick up what I can—or risk holding them? Don't you see, Marling, I've got no work to do. I've got all my days to *think*! I think from morning till night—most of the night, too. I can't sleep for thinking! I wanted to sell out a month ago, but you advised me not to."

"No, Clements," Marling said again. "I did not do that. You asked me what I thought of the future."

"Same thing."

"No, Clements—not quite the same thing. I tell you, to-day, that I regard the future most optimistically. For myself I have a large holding and for my private purposes those shares will remain where they are. If that affects your judgment—then you must not accept it as my advice. That you will get from your stockbroker—not from me."

Clements sat thoughtfully; the fingers of his left hand

twitching nervously. Now twisting a piece of trousering; now running his hand up and down his shin bone in erratic movements.

"A drink?" Marling asked.

"A large whisky," Clements replied, vacantly.

The order was given and the drinks arrived. Marling sat, meantime, fingering his chin; his eyes looked tired; his colour pallid.

"If only one could *know*!" Clements said suddenly. "The damned uncertainty of it all! Really, Marling, I've been driven almost mad! It's been a hard time for me since the war. For over a year I had my mother to help. My father's pension wasn't much, and was only for her lifetime, anyway. Then when she died, it meant a little more for me. I saw the chance of doing some of the things I've always wanted to do, then. By pinching a bit I saw that they might be possible. You see, I don't mind travelling third-class, so long as I can get abroad. Sunshine—you know, Marling. The blessed dampness over here plays hell with me. I saw a chance in 'Combines.' . . ."

"Yes," Marling said, and gulped down his whisky and soda quickly. Then he rose from the settee.

"Don't go!" Clements cried. "Don't go!"

"Must, I'm afraid."

"Let me buy you a drink. Just one before you go."

"Nice of you, Clements. I must go, I'm afraid."

Clements rose with difficulty.

"I'll walk to the door with you, then," he said, the heavy stick with the rubber nozzle thumping on the floor beside him as he walked.

"Keep me posted," he pleaded, as they both stood in the hall. "It means a lot to me, Marling."

"I will," Marling replied, and turned to walk down the few steps to the street. He turned at the bottom to find Clements still standing there, resting heavily on his stick—his expression like that of a child, dreading to be left alone; a fear of unknown things; perhaps an intense desire for companionship because it is unutterably lonely. . . . Marling had seen many children look that way.

He turned again and hailed a taxi.

"180, Lancaster Gate," he said.

It was just getting dark, the dusk merging into night-fall. A chilliness was in the air. Marling shivered as he sat on the cold leather of the taxi seat. Mosenthal. . . . Henry Barlow. . . . Lord Ewart. . . . Clements. . . . The shares down to two and a quarter! . . . But he was going to see Mosenthal now. This conversation with Ewart had troubled him. Rumours like that would do more harm than anything else. If the Board were selling their own shares—what faith could the public have in their Company? This rumour had to be investigated; it had to be stopped. Mosenthal must know about it at once. He would find ways of combating it, if any man could. And Clements. . . . He could understand that anxiety; he could understand his resentment. The old fellow had never known many of the good things of this life. Yet he had longed for them because he could appreciate them. The plans he had laid for his future. . . . The sunshine for his gout. . . .

Marling blew his nose violently as the taxi drew up. Mitchell—Mosenthal's butler—opened the door.

"Is Mr. Mosenthal in?" Marling asked.

"No, sir."

"But I rang up his office. I was told he had gone home."

"He did come in, sir. But he's gone out again."

"Any idea where?"

"No, sir. He's not coming back to-night, that I know."

"I see," Marling said, thoughtfully. "Thank you." Then he turned and entered the same taxi again.

"87, Princes Gate," he said.

* * * * *

Dawn came at last. For hours Marling had lain listening to the blind tapping against the window-pane and to the wind whistling outside. Rain had beaten against his windows, too, at intervals during the night, as Marling had tossed from side to side. . . . Clements. . . . Ewart. . . . The shares. . . . Mosenthal. . . . Henry Barlow. . . . He did not think of them in strict rotation—in the order

of their happening. Instead they came individually, like nightmares, only to interrupt his sleep. Mostly it was of Henry that he thought—of his infernal pompousness. For the first time in his life he felt that he could know Henry no more. After his behaviour of the morning, any intercourse between them was not possible. He had been insulting; he had been insufferable. And after all these years he could not help feeling sad about it. He remembered the old days when Effie had been alive. The dinners they had had together. Their hunting days; the shoots that Henry and he had taken together. And it was now regarded as a certainty that he would get a peerage in the next Honours List. . . . And too damned proud now, because of it, to be associated with Mosenthal! And Clements. . . . In his disquieting dreams he saw Clements' face as he leant heavily on his stick—like someone who is lost and looks vainly for his leader. . . . But dawn came at last. . . . Later, Jordon brought his early tea. The morning papers were neatly folded on the tray. . . . He reached for them feverishly. . . . Yes, the papers made much of the further drop in the shares!

Marling rose and dressed carefully. He breakfasted frugally in his long dining-room. Walker was at the wheel of his car when Jordon opened the front door, and at once Walker was on his feet, the door of the car opened, a rug over his arm.

"Drive to my office first. Wait there! I want to go down to the city almost immediately."

"Very good, sir."

Ten minutes later Marling was looking through his post; a quarter of an hour later he was back in his car driving to Old Broad Street.

"Is Mr. Mosenthal in?" he asked the girl at the switchboard.

"No, sir. Not yet."

"Mr. Bernher?"

"He's ill—I think. I'll inquire."

"Send Mr. Mosenthal's secretary to me in the Board-room."

"Very good, Mr. Marling."

The Board-room was empty. He looked in at Mosenthal's office. It was tidier than he had seen it. No papers lay on his desk, which had been recently dusted. The sound-proof doors and windows admitted no noise from the street; there was a silence, save for the steady ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece. The telephone in the Board-room sounded through the open door. Marling walked through and lifted the receiver.

"Miss Clifford is not in this morning," the voice said. "I think she must be ill."

"They can't all be ill!"

"Is it a stenographer you're wanting, Mr. Marling?"

"Stenographer! No! Get on to Mr. Mosenthal's house!"

In a moment he was through.

"Who's that speaking? Mitchell? Well, has Mr. Mosenthal returned? No? Surely he left an address? I want to speak to him urgently—most urgently. He's not back? Was he definitely going away for the night? Did he take luggage? Oh—he did. Much? A trunk! Oh! Thank you."

In a moment Marling was in the outside office.

"Find me somebody who knows something!" he shouted.

Heads rose from desks. Others turned in their chairs. As if an electric current had suddenly been turned off, so did the hubbub of the outside office cease. The sudden silence seemed to stun Marling; he seemed temporarily thrown off his balance.

"I want somebody," he began. "Somebody in authority. Had Mr. Bernher an assistant?"

"Yes, sir," said a voice. "Mr. Dixon."

"Send him to me!"

Marling closed the Board-room door, relieved to be away from that sea of inquiring faces. He found himself pacing the floor. . . . An eternity before the appearance of Mr. Dixon.

"You're Dixon?"

"Yes, sir."

"You work for Mr. Bernher?"

"Yes, sir."
"Where is he?"
"Ill, sir."
"How long has he been ill?"
"To-day, sir."
"And Miss Clifford—she's ill, too?"
"She's not in yet, sir."
"Here yesterday?"
"Oh—yes, sir."
"Did Mr. Bernher happen to mention where Mr. Mosenthal was going last night?"
"No, sir. I'll ring up his house, if you like," and Dixon made a movement towards the telephone. Marling found his irritation getting the better of him.
"I want Mr. Mosenthal urgently!" he said. "He went away last night. He's taken luggage. Who usually buys the tickets here? Is there a shipping clerk?"
"I do, sir—usually."
"Did you buy any tickets yesterday?"
Dixon scratched his head.
"I bought a ticket for the Hague," he said. "But that was not for Mr. Mosenthal."
"Who was it for?"
"For Mr. Holbrook, I think."
"Are you sure?"
Dixon scratched his head again.
"Yes, sir. That's right," he said. "Miss Clifford asked me to do it. I remember it now."
"Well, Mr. Holbrook's in Paris!" Marling snapped.
Mr. Bernher's assistant seemed ill at ease.
"I may be mistaken," he said, apologetically, "but I'd swear those were my instructions, sir. I've put his name on the counterfoil, anyway."
"I see. Thank you, Mr. Dixon!"
The untidy-looking clerk looked again at his Director, who stood towering above him with flushed face, his lean figure taut—as if waiting to strike at some unseen thing. Reginald Dixon turned and left the room. The Board-room door closed.
Marling reached for his hat.

"I'm going to Mr. Greville's offices," he said to the girl at the switchboard. "Ring me up there if you have any news. Get on to Mr. Bernher's home, meantime, and put a call through to me there. I must speak to Mr. Bernher. It's most urgent. I'll be at Mr. Greville's offices in five minutes."

Marling was through the swing-door without waiting for confirmation of his instructions.

"Look here, Greville, I'm frankly worried," he began breathlessly.

"So am I," Greville replied, looking up. "Damnably worried! Did you read of the Boreham crash this morning? It's the biggest thing since the war. Mosenthal's in it—up to his eyes. I know. I've dealt for him. And this transfer note which came into my office this morning bears out what I'm saying. Read it! He must be in a *hell* of a bad way!"

Marling's hand reached for the paper that was offered to him. But he did not read it. His eyes never left Greville's. . . . He stood unsteadily.

"Yes—Mosenthal's selling out!" Greville continued. "Has been for some time, if I'm not mistaken. This is his Trust—they're selling out. *Selling out fast!*"

"But Greville—he wouldn't dare!"

"Dare! Hasn't Mosenthal always dared even the devil himself?"

"But Greville—I'm guaranteeing the overdraft. . . ."

"You're guaranteeing it! For how much?"

"Ninety thousand."

"Christ! You're joking!"

"But surely . . ."

"Get hold of Mosenthal—quick! For God's sake don't waste a moment!"

"But I've been—he's not there!"

The telephone on Greville's desk rang sharply. Greville lifted the receiver. "It's for you," he said.

Marling's eyes still searched Greville's face.

"Take the message," he said quietly.

"What?—Mr. Bernher is—what? Oh, I see, there is no reply from his house. I see. Thank you."

The room became suddenly blurred. . . . Greville's face indistinct.

CHAPTER XIX

THE days following were filled with action and quick thinking. Marling faced the position fearlessly, working day and night to unravel its entanglements. He had wired to Holbrook in Paris; he had traced Sir John Bickworth in Scotland; he had called Henry Newcomb from his Fleet Street offices; Basil Northcote from his house in Suffolk. The disappearance of Richard Mosenthal was now complete.

A cryptic letter had been received at Princes Gate—"*I am sorry if I inconvenience you temporarily, but one day I will repay. Do not think ill of me, my friend. One day I will explain all to you. It is imperative that I leave now.*" That was all that Marling knew. The letter bore the Hague postmark.

The Company's auditors were called in; the Company's solicitors also. Rudolf Bernher could not be found. Richard Mosenthal's secretary, Miss Clifford, had been traced to Worthing—but she had no constructive information. Mosenthal had dismissed her with a handsome present for her services. With the £100 note she was taking a well-earned rest by the sea. No. She did not think it at all strange that he should dismiss her at so short a notice. She had worked for Richard Mosenthal before. That was the way he always did things—quickly; impulsively. Besides, he had talked of re-engaging her at an early date, which would necessitate her working on the Continent. Had he talked of leaving so suddenly that night? Yes, he had. Was there any reason given? Well—to be honest, she knew Mr. Mosenthal personally. Nothing wrong in their relationship, of course. . . . He had asked her to say nothing about it because he wished it that way. Internal politics, you know. And, of course, if Mr. Mosenthal asked her, she could only obey. . . . A wonderful man, Mr. Mosenthal. His mind was never

still. . . . She was used to the way he did things. . . . She had worked for him on and off for over ten years, you know, and if you can't know a man in *that* time. . . .

But of the things that mattered, Kathleen Clifford knew nothing. Her faded beauty, as she sat looking at him across the Board-room table, struck Marling as damnably pathetic. And yet, he was utterly repulsed by the situation that was now disclosed. There was no question of their relationship; there was no question in the minds of any of them. If it came to that, Kathleen Clifford was proud to have been Mosenthal's mistress. She had, on further questioning, spoken of the flat he had rented for her in Maida Vale. And as she had let that information slip out, she wisely refrained from attempting to hide it further. Yes, she had lived with Richard Mosenthal on and off for the last ten years. Presently, she felt sure, she would rejoin him again. There had been others, of course. . . . Mosenthal was never a 'one-woman' man. Yes, she would rejoin him again as soon as he was ready. Of course, she had only acted as stenographer in connection with his more private affairs and of the business itself she really knew very little. . . .

Marling watched her leave the Board-room and afterwards opened a window. The cheap scent that she felt entitled to wear in the office, now that she was no longer in their employment, still hung about the room. It was a degrading business. At other times this news would have shocked Marling considerably. As it was, his mind was too occupied with more important things—things that increased in their seriousness with each passing hour.

Cortland Speed was a frequent visitor. He was sympathetic—but he had his job to do. With the disappearance of Mosenthal at so critical a time, the question of their overdraft became a matter over which no time could be lost.

"Mr. Marling," Speed said, on the morning of the third day following Mosenthal's disappearance, "knowing the inside details of this matter—as I do—I sympathize with you sincerely. That your chairman elects to leave the ship at this very moment makes me most apprehensive for you."

"For me—why?"

"Your guarantee."

"But I'll be covered all right, Speed. There doesn't seem any question of that."

And at that moment a knock had come at the Board-room door.

"Come in!"

A man appeared—a cable in his hand.

"Shall I come back, sir?" he asked, retreating.

"No. No. What is it?"

"Mr. Broadson thought you ought to see this, sir."

Marling reached for the cable. '*Reference your cable* 56. *See ours of eleventh instant—Stanilos.*'

"To what does this apply?" he asked.

"A question of prices, sir. We cabled out, not having heard further."

"Where is the cable referred to?"

"It is not on the files, sir."

"Is there any record of it having been received?"

"No, sir."

"When did this cable arrive?"

"This morning, sir."

"Well—why haven't you cabled out for particulars—or made inquiries? Why all this delay?"

"Mr. Broadson remembers a cable being handed to Mr. Mosenthal the morning he—er—went abroad, sir. He wondered whether perhaps you had seen it. You were with Mr. Mosenthal shortly afterwards."

Marling looked steadily at the man who stood before him. Keeping his feelings perfectly controlled, he said: "Where is Mr. Broadson?"

"Down at the Epping Factory, sir. I telephoned him, as it is a matter that comes under his control."

"I see. Well—cable out immediately!"

"Very good, sir."

Marling continued to look at the ink-stand before him. Cortland Speed stood by the fireplace, fingering his blue spotted tie.

"Then we meet at three o'clock?" Speed said. "Your co-directors will be here then?"

"Yes," Marling answered, without looking up, "at three o'clock. They will all be here then."

Cortland Speed fingered his tie once more. Then he walked slowly over to the chair by the door and picked up his hat. He stood undecided for a moment. Then he said: "I hope, Mr. Marling, that things will not be so black as they appear. I hope that sincerely."

"Oh—they'll come right, Speed. They'll come right."

"Yes."

Marling looked up then. "Oh—you're going?" he said.

"Till three o'clock."

Their hands met. Cortland Speed smiled reassuringly; Marling smiled in return. Alone once more, he quickly rang a bell.

"Who was that man who came in just now?"

"Jackson, sir."

"Send him to me!"

At twelve o'clock Sir John Bickworth and Henry Newcomb were arriving. Marling had come down earlier to have a private talk with Speed. . . . He was glad he had.

Jackson returned.

"Has that cable gone off?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well—let me see the reply the moment it comes in. Ring me up at my offices, or at my home, if I am not here."

"Very good, sir."

Again a pacing of the carpet. Marling wondered how many hours he had spent during the last few days, walking up and down the strip nearest to the window—the same piece of carpet trodden so often by Mosenthal in his excitable moments. Marling seemed now unable to remain in a sitting position. When he was in the company of others, his duty was to remain outwardly calm. But alone. . . . He paused for a moment by the window. He and Mosenthal had stood at that window the day that he had first heard of Jefferson. He remembered his thoughts at that time. Their argument had ended. He had walked there from the table because he had been considerably

angered. No, perhaps that was not correct. Perhaps he had been more nonplussed. That any public man could ever consider meeting the demands of a blackmailer had seemed to him a situation without parallel. At least, any man whom he knew intimately. But he had realized, as he stood there, that Mosenthal was a foreigner, and there is a fundamental difference in those points of view. So he had merely said: "Well, let them think you are going to fight it tooth and nail." That had been the beginning of many discussions, culminating in Marling's threat of resignation if this money were paid. . . . And it hadn't been paid. . . . Now Mosenthal had disappeared leaving only his mistress behind. . . . And she knew nothing. . . . Again a pacing of the carpet. . . .

In a few days now the position would be clearer and they would know where they stood, anyway. This system of secrecy—of letting no man know the *whole* of a story—which Mosenthal always employed—hindered their work, for they could not get to the bottom of any problem without endless effort. The outside offices were now filled with strange faces—of auditors and their books. On every side were worried faces that watched Marling anxiously when they caught glimpses of him going to and fro. He felt that they were looking to him at this time, as a soldier looks to his officer before battle, watching every change of expression, as one looks at a weathercock to see from whence the wind is blowing. He realized, too, that they looked to him because he, more than any other of the Directors, had spent more time in Mosenthal's company. For some reason, inexplicable to Marling, he had felt that Mosenthal had liked him. They had no common bond and yet he would often call, uninvited, at Princes Gate and talk of things other than 'Combine' affairs—of music, of art, of literature. On one occasion, he had even attended Divine Service with him at St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, because Marling had remarked upon the quality of the singing there. . . . It seemed impossible to think that this man had deserted him! It seemed impossible to put more sinister interpretations upon his hasty departure than a sudden brainstorm brought on by excessive work

—making him lose his head for a moment because the fruits of his labour seemed temporarily out of his reach. . . . But with each passing hour the position had become more involved. . . . There was also the complete withdrawal of the man most intimately associated with Mosenthal—Rudolf Bernher. . . . That caused Marling considerable alarm. But a man like Mosenthal—a man so powerful in the city of London—a man who proffered Marling his friendship—could do no criminal action. . . . That was uppermost always in Marling's mind.

But the hours went by; they became days. And still Christopher Marling did not know where matters stood. Each thing that arose to bring further doubts to his mind was quickly brushed aside—although his mind had tabulated it before doing so. But they were not days to fill one's mind with unnecessary fears and alarms. 'Sufficient unto the day' had been his creed—always. To make provision, but not to meet troubles half-way. Whilst there was hope, his duty was to remain optimistic. Besides, if things were badly wrong at the close of these investigations, he would need all his courage then. . . . He must keep himself buoyed up. . . . So still he paced that strip of carpet.

They met Cortland Speed that afternoon in company with one of the Bank's directors. The gravity with which the Bank viewed the situation was apparent from both their faces. The shares were already down to thirty shillings! The world did not yet know of Mosenthal's disappearance. When it did, of course, there would be a panic in the city. The guarantee that the Bank held would hardly be worth the paper it was written on—if the market went mad and rushed out to sell. Maybe, dealings in the shares would be suspended altogether, for the time being. The Directors of the Bank could, therefore, only regard Mr. Marling's personal guarantee for fifty thousand pounds as any security at all. They were, however, prepared to leave the matter until the investigations were completed. Meantime, they felt sure that they would appreciate that no further cheques could be drawn. . . .

Presently Cortland Speed and his director left them,

and the Board settled down immediately to consider the question of the payment of staff and factory wages at the end of the week. . . . It was after seven before they left and Marling drove back with Sir John. Apart from a few casual remarks, neither of them spoke during that journey.

And as Jordon remarked to Mrs. Perks that night, when he retired to the servants' hall after dinner: "It's the twelfth night the old chap's dined alone."

* * * * *

The blow fell next morning. Jackson brought in a cable. It read: "*Have received lower quotations. Contract now definitely placed elsewhere—Stanilos.*"

Marling handed it unsteadily to Holbrook: Holbrook to Sir John Bickworth, and Sir John to Henry Newcomb: Newcomb to Basil Northcote. No word was spoken. The bomb had exploded, stunning them all with its violence. Then Henry Newcomb spoke:

"God!" he said. "Good God!—the man must have been mad to do it!"

"Mad?" Sir John sneered, reaching for the cable again.

"Our South American contract!" Holbrook exclaimed. "This is *damnably* serious!"

But Christopher Marling spoke not at all. He looked steadily at the ink-stand that was now so familiar an object in his mind . . . and watched its shape change as if by some optical illusion—now squat—now growing in height —now back to normal. . . .

"That's it—of course!" he heard Newcomb saying. "As soon as he knew that—he destroyed the first cable —and hopped it—quick!"

"Without that contract," Sir John was saying, deliberately, "there seems little hope, gentlemen."

"The factories are working on the stuff now!" Holbrook said quickly. "It's a different specification! We'll not sell it easily elsewhere!"

"The position, gentlemen," Sir John repeated, "is that without that contract to pull us through—there is little hope. Let us face that—squarely."

The telephone rang by Marling's side. He lifted the

receiver as one in a trance. He listened. Then he replaced it again. "Mr. Speed is waiting," he said quietly, "I have asked him to come in."

The door opened and Cortland Speed entered.

* * * * *

Christopher Marling walked on, his face set, his step measured. The afternoon papers had come out with their headlines. The world now knew that Mosenthal had fled the country. The panic that Marling had anticipated would follow, had taken place, but it had been more ghastly than that. . . . The late editions had printed Mosenthal's photograph on the front page. *Beside it, a photograph of Christopher Marling!* . . . The one that had been taken for Effie's birthday ten years ago! . . . She had always liked that photograph. . . . And now it appeared beside Mosenthal's, as if he were some accomplice in the irregularities which the papers inferred had been taking place in the management of the 'Combine.' . . .

Marling walked on, his eyes looking straight ahead, his malacca cane gripped in his right hand, so that it swung with his arm. . . . Yes, this was a time when he would need courage. . . . He gripped the cane more tightly, his left hand clenching its fingers in unison. . . . Would the people recognize him, he wondered, as they passed? . . . His eyes were gleaming, showing the fever that lay beneath; his lips, beneath his grey moustache, tightly drawn. Along Queen Victoria Street he walked. Air—that was what he was needing—air! The atmosphere of the Board-room in Old Broad Street had become intolerable; the faces of his co-directors a nightmare. He had watched the effect of the news upon all of them. Their concern for his own position, which had dawned upon them later, had touched him deeply. But he was in no mood for sentimentality. The situation had to be faced; it had, if possible, to be secreted from those who knew him intimately. But meanwhile it was not the question of his own financial position that concerned him. . . . It was Barbara's marriage settlement. . . . He had put ordinary shares into that settlement. . . . To-day they were almost valueless!

For a moment he seemed unable to look straight in front of him. His eyes seemed to search the pavement in avoiding the glances of those who passed. He, Christopher Marling, a solicitor of King Street, St. James's, had been guilty of most unprofessional conduct! . . . He had practised for thirty-five years in the West End of London. His practice had grown and was still growing. People came to him because they trusted him; so many people had stated that fact definitely. And yet, with his own kith and kin, he had acted most unprofessionally; he had handed over to Barbara's marriage settlement some of his own holding . . . ordinary shares! . . . to-day they were almost valueless! . . . Was this Retribution, he wondered? . . .

He crossed the road by Blackfriars Bridge and proceeded along the river's side. Tugs passed, dragging barges in their wake. The sky in the distance was clouding over as if some storm were imminent. The darkness of the approaching storm lessened the twilight. Already the trams that rattled past were fully illuminated. It was high tide and the sudden gusts of wind whipped the water against the Embankment walls. The lights across the water twinkled; the street lamps on his side cast dismal shadows as he walked, the malacca cane still held in that vice-like grip.

It was all over now!

He tried to arrange the many incidents of the last few days into correct formation in his mind—from the moment that Greville had told him that Mosenthal had been selling out, until the final blow had fallen that morning. But his mind seemed unable to grasp all the intricate details that had come to light during their investigations. He seemed able only to realize that he had been a pawn in a large game, as other pawns had been used. He did not yet know the worst. There was a hope that something might be saved from the morass. Otherwise. . . .

He walked on. . . . But this was no time for those thoughts. This was a time for courage. . . . Sixty-seven? What was that? He could still work. He was full of energy. His life, so far, had been devoid of dramatic

incident; his had been a leisurely existence. Effie, of course! Yes, she had been taken from him. That had been his biggest grief—and would always be. But sixty-seven? What was that? He could still start building again. It would need a stiff upper lip, but he'd do it. 'A guinea-pig,' one of the papers had called him! *A guinea-pig!* He'd show them whether he was a 'guinea-pig!' Why, even Lord Ewart had complimented him upon his work on the 'Shield' Board. Guinea-pig indeed! That remark had stung him. Of course things looked black—on paper. He had had a more close association with Mosenthal than with any other of the Directors. There was no gainsaying that. But did those wretched journalists in Fleet Street expect him to stand by and allow things to go from bad to worse after that unfortunate occurrence at the Company's meeting? Hadn't he more than made amends for his initial blunder? Hadn't he handed over three-quarters of his personal fortune in trying to put that matter right? And what was his blunder, anyway? —A blunder only of inexperience. As for being a guinea-pig—he had taken a strong stand with Mosenthal! He had threatened to resign even! Was *that* being a guinea-pig? He had won the day, anyhow—whatever the consequences. . . .

He stamped on. He was nearing Charing Cross now. . . . Yes, the more he thought about it, the more he realized that the only mud that could be thrown at him publicly was his association with Mosenthal. But many far greater men than he had been in the same position. They had all been deceived by the magnetism of a personality. The bluff Henry Newcomb—for example—that direct and able man. Sir John Bickworth—that quiet man of analytical mind. Could he, Marling, be blamed above any for that association? Could he be blamed for being taken in, too—he, whose business was the Law? . . . No, he felt, there was nothing dishonourable in this dreadful business —this appalling crash that was to come. He had acted according to his principles. The fact that those principles might cost him three-quarters of his personal fortune did not concern him at that moment. . . . It was the photo-

graph on the front page of the evening paper he carried in his coat pocket, that hurt. . . . He, who hated publicity in any form, to find his photograph plastered across the front page! . . . He hurried his steps. He must get home. He must be away from the people in streets who might recognize him. . . . Millions of those papers would be sold that night. . . .

He crossed into Northumberland Avenue. . . . But was that the right way to face the music?—he thought —this hiding? No—indeed no. He must behave as usual; as if nothing had happened. He must carry his head high—as he had always done. He must live his life—as before. To make any noticeable change in his habits at this moment, might tend to make people wonder. . . . Yes, he must go into his club that very night. The newspapers would lay folded on the table facing him as he entered the Smoking-room. By the position in which the steward always folded and placed them there, the top of his head would just appear in each copy. . . . Everyone in the Smoking-room would have seen it. . . . But he would behave as if nothing had happened, when he entered that room. He would talk to those members he knew. It would need courage to do that, but that was the only way. What had he done for which he should feel ashamed? The only thing—yes—was Barbara's marriage settlement, and that he could put right. And, besides, no one knew about that. It was a personal matter, anyway. It in no way affected his honour as a public man. Of his actions throughout the whole of the last few months he felt that he would not behave differently were he faced with the same situation again that very night. He had been guilty of an error of judgment and for that he was paying heavily. That he had made the initial error was due to inexperience only—the inexperience of an older man trying to consider life on its old basis; tackling its problems with obsolete machinery. . . . Yes, he must go into the club that very night and face them.

Across Trafalgar Square into Pall Mall. . . . He passed Lawson by the Carlton Hotel, but they did not speak.

Lawson had not seen him. He was glad about that. Somehow, it was the people he knew least well that he feared; to have to go into lengthy explanations with people he hardly knew was a thought that he considered with apprehension. People would want to hear about it. And of Mosenthal. They would want to know all the details. Some would be sympathetic; some, perhaps, would be unbelieving. It was an unpleasant business from whichever angle he viewed it. But it had to be faced. . . . He turned into St. James's Square and presently came into King Street. Shortly he climbed the stairs to his office, realizing for the first time that he was tired; he had walked the entire way from the city.

Benson rose from the chair in his small office at the top of the stairs.

"Lord Ewart is waiting to see you, sir," he said awkwardly, omitting any mention of the evening paper which Marling saw lying on his desk with the photograph uppermost.

"Thank you, Benson." And then: "Is he in my room?"

"No, sir. In with Mr. Buxton."

"Ask him to come in, please."

Marling proceeded to his room. . . . Good fellow, Benson! . . . Nice of him not to mention that photograph . . . knew it would have affected him. . . . He hung up his coat and hat and walked to his desk. Yes, he was tired—infernally tired. He sat for a moment, his finger-tips together. . . . But he was keeping his head pretty well, he thought. His faculties had returned now, too. He was fully aware of the seriousness of the situation, but one thing at a time. . . . The whole situation must be taken piece by piece, considered—and solved in its own way. . . . And Lord Ewart had called. That was typical of Ewart—sympathetic, kindly, considerate. He would appreciate Ewart's sympathy more than any other, for they sat together on the Board of the 'Shield,' and Ewart would not be unmindful of Marling's invidious position at this moment.

The door opened and Lord Ewart entered.

With an effort:

"Ah—Ewart. Nice of you to call."

"I've been waiting some time, Marling. I rang up the 'Combine.' They said you'd left for here over an hour ago."

"I walked."

"Ah—that accounts for it."

"If I'd known, of course . . ."

Lord Ewart raised a plump hand, beautifully manicured and pink.

"Not a bit, Marling," he smiled. "I've been improving my acquaintance with Buxton. A charming fellow!"

"He is. Sit down, won't you?"

Lord Ewart obeyed, his hat on his lap. Marling felt an artificiality in the atmosphere. . . . Ewart fidgeted with his hat for a moment, then he said:

"Well—Marling. Things look bad."

"They do."

"I'm extremely sorry for you."

"Thank you, Ewart."

"Will you be involved much yourself? It seems pretty clear that you'll have to liquidate."

Marling thought for a moment.

"It will hit me—a bit," he answered. "I held quite a number."

"That's too bad," Ewart replied. "Personally, I got out before the biggest drop came. I've lost quite a lot, all the same."

"I'm sorry to hear it. I'm afraid a lot of money has been lost."

"Yes—Marling. There has." Then Lord Ewart looked across the desk. "It doesn't read too well," he said.

"These newspapers, Ewart. . . ."

"Quite. That's their job. But the details can't be exaggerated, Marling. There's a warrant out for Mosenthal's arrest. I suppose you know that?"

Marling looked steadily into Ewart's eyes. Under the desk his fingers were suddenly gripping the sides of his chair.

"I did not know that," he answered, trying to hide the falter in his voice. "Are you sure?"

"It's in the Stop Press of my paper."

Mosenthal a criminal! . . . The room for a moment seemed to be going round. . . . Marling tightened his grip on the sides of his chair. . . . Then the colour seemed to return to his cheeks and he was aware that they were burning—on fire almost! His eyes, too. . . . A thumping in his chest as his heart increased its beating. . . . Then a sudden subsiding as it thumped again more steadily. . . . But it left him with a feeling of nausea. . . . The room suddenly stifling, as the atmosphere of the Board-room at Old Broad Street had been during the last days.

"That is terrible, Ewart!" he said, quietly.

"It is. I'm afraid worse things are to come."

Marling tried to find words, but he could not speak.

"It will be the biggest crash in recent times," he heard Ewart saying. "God knows how far it will reach. I'm told his other companies are in as bad a way, too. It's a dreadful blow for the prestige of the city, Marling—a dreadful blow! Of course—until they've arrested him no one knows where they are. Only he can unravel the appalling mess he has left behind."

Mosenthal to be arrested! . . . His Chairman . . . they had visited the opera together . . . dined together . . . the thing was impossible! . . . a man that he knew so intimately!

"Mosenthal will return," Marling found himself saying sharply. "Of course he will return!"

"At this moment," Ewart pointed out, "he is taking every possible precaution of covering up his tracks, Marling. That hardly fits in, does it? And the growing of his beard. You saw that in the paper, I suppose?"

"No," Marling answered. "I have not read my paper to-night. I saw the front page and . . ."

"Quite. Of course—your photograph."

"A great shock to me, Ewart."

"I think it was you, Marling, who agreed with me about public men—being there to be shot at," Ewart replied.

" If you elect to act on the Board of a large company —and the management of that company turns out to be responsible for one of the most ghastly failures of recent times—a failure which will do more harm to the city of London than any I can remember—then you must not be surprised if the Press reproduce your photograph. That, surely, is very little."

Marling looked up. There seemed an unnecessary sting in that remark. Already the blood was rushing again to his cheeks.

" Those may be the facts, Ewart, but is it necessary to speak so plainly? I am already more than aware of them! "

" I am glad," Ewart replied, " that you appreciate your responsibilities."

" Really, Ewart! One would imagine . . ."

Again Lord Ewart raised his hand.

" Believe me, Marling, my task is not easy," he said.

" Your task? "

" Believe me, Marling, I find it most difficult to speak at this moment. We have known each other for many years now. For myself, I trust you—implicitly. I regard you as a friend—a dear friend. There is no question in my mind that you have been the victim—the victim of circumstance. Nevertheless, we must consider the position—from the world's point of view. There is going to be a scandal over this affair—a terrible scandal, I am afraid. The world, not knowing you as I do, will only judge the position from the facts that are given. And those, I am afraid, will read badly, Marling—very badly."

Lord Ewart paused and looked up. Marling gave no outward sign of having heard him. His eyes were opened wide—staring at the blotting-paper in front of him.

" So whilst you and I, and those who know you, will realize the position," he continued awkwardly, " there are thousands who will regard you as jointly responsible for these gross irregularities. I am speaking bluntly, Marling, for I think it is better."

Again Marling did not answer.

" Believe me, dear fellow, it grieves me," Lord Ewart

continued in a softer voice, "to have to act as messenger in this way, but I felt it was better that I came to see you. For you, personally, I am grieved beyond words. After such a splendid career as you have had, to be mixed up in a scandal of this nature—well, it is the greatest pity —the greatest shame. You—of all people, Marling. I speak sincerely. Nevertheless, the world does not know you as we do. The world will judge you by the cold, hard facts. Those facts will reflect badly, Marling, I'm afraid. You realize that, of course?"

"Yes," Marling said presently, "I do."

"For that reason," Lord Ewart continued, "we feel that you should resign immediately from the 'Shield' Board."

The room seemed to revolve again. . . . his brain seemed to reel. . . . He clutched again at the sides of his chair. . . . Then, with an effort, he raised his eyes and looked at Lord Ewart, who was nervously twisting his top-hat in his hand, as he sat opposite to him.

"You need have no fears on that score, Ewart!" he said deliberately. "My resignation will be in the Chairman's hands to-morrow morning!"

Lord Ewart rose awkwardly.

"Believe me, Marling, I am exceedingly sorry. It is the most unpleasant task I have ever allotted to myself. I thought it better to see you. Letters, you know, are . . ."

"Damned good of you, Ewart! Damned good of you! Having delivered your message, I'll be obliged if you'll leave me!"

"My dear fellow—you take it badly. . . ."

"My presence on your Board embarrasses you! Very well! You'll have my resignation to-morrow! The matter is closed!"

"But, my dear Marling, don't you understand? I've come to try and place the position before you as nicely as . . ."

"Nicely! Can any man tell another that his very presence is harmful—*nicely?*"

"I am sorry," Ewart said a moment later, "that you

take it so personally. I thought you would appreciate our position in the matter, too."

"Oh—I appreciate your position all right! Don't run away with any false ideas on that score! You have your job to do, I suppose. I see that!"

"Then, why?"

Marling looked up to see Lord Ewart's hand outstretched towards him.

"I am sorry, Lord Ewart," he said, controlling himself, "but I cannot take your hand."

"But Marling . . ."

For his answer, Lord Ewart looked down into two eyes that seemed to stare at him in anger such as he had seldom seen.

"You are overwrought," Ewart said, awkwardly. "Understandable, too. You've been through a bad time recently. No one's known it more than I. I've seen the change in you. It's worried me. It's worried all of us. This must be a blow to you—a great blow. That, I understand. Nevertheless, you are the first man, Marling, to face facts. You're the last man to lose his sense of logic. Logic, dear friend, is the basis of your profession. My news has stunned you for a moment. The deplorable conditions under which you have spent your days during the last weeks have confined your thoughts in one direction only—the unravelling of your business. You have had no time to consider your position from an outside point of view. When you have, dear friend, you will see the necessity for your resignation. As the attacks upon Mosenthal's honour affected the price of your 'Combine' shares—so would a member of our Board who had any stigma attaching to him be harmful to us—the word you yourself used, Marling. This is not a personal matter. Unfortunately, it is—Life. Life plays funny tricks on us. Sometimes those tricks are cruel. Often they are unjust. In your case they are both cruel—*and* unjust. Maybe in the course of the investigations, your name will be cleared—as it should be—as we all know it should be. But as you guarded the good name of your company, so must we guard ours. Millions of people come to us each year

to insure their property, their lives, their businesses. They come to us because they have faith in our integrity—in our reserves and in our management. Both you and Sir John Bickworth have been associated with a company whose name to-night is blazoned throughout the world as one of its biggest failures. Don't you see? And don't you see how difficult it is for me to come to you—you who I know to be the soul of honesty?"

Marling looked up.

"Sir John—is he resigning, too?"

"He will be asked to do so."

Marling rose unsteadily and walked over to the book-case.

"Ewart," he said, "this news, you know, on top of it all! It's hard to keep your head. Had a worrying time. Don't you see, too, Ewart, what it all means to me? I may be broken, out of all this? Broken! I must talk, I've kept it to myself too long. I've known you a long time. You'll respect my confidence. Ninety thousand pounds of mine is in that show! Don't know yet what'll be saved from the wreck. Maybe nothing. It only seemed to occur to me while you were talking just now. Was taking things as they came, you know. And then the interpretation the world will put upon my actions. I've treasured my name, Ewart. My father was one of the greatest Generals of his time. A name that I am proud to own. To-day, the name of Marling has a stigma attaching to it. I have been intimately associated with a man who is being searched for by the police of Europe! My photograph is plastered beside his in every paper in this country! God, Ewart! *Logic!*"

"Ninety thousand pounds? You don't mean it, Marling!"

Marling passed his hand across his forehead as he leant against the bookcase.

"Keep it to yourself," he muttered. "Keep it to yourself. Shouldn't have told you, I suppose. Losing control a bit—*Logic!*"

Lord Ewart rose and walked over to him.

"Look here, old fellow," he said. "Come back with me to-night. Dine with me. Talk things over."

"Nice of you. No. I've things to do." Suddenly his hand went again to his head. "Clements!" he cried. "*I must see Clements!*"

"Clements?"

Marling reached quickly for his hat and coat.

"Can I help?"

"Benson!" Marling called through the door that he had opened.

"Where are you going?"

"Forgive me, Ewart. I must go. Sorry I lost my head a bit. I'm jumpy to-day. Nerves all wrong. Better after a good sleep. Things keep coming to me. Have to try and solve each one as it comes. I'll resign, of course. That's one thing settled, anyway. . . ."

Marling left his sentence unfinished. He did not even await the arrival of Benson. He left Lord Ewart standing in his room, a frown of deep perplexity upon his face. . . . Down the stairs and into King Street, turning right and into St. James's Street, and northwards to his club.

"Mr. Clements—is he in?" he asked Stevens behind his glass cubicle.

"No, sir. Mr. Clements left about an hour ago."

"Any idea where he was going?"

"No, sir."

"Did he—seem quite well?"

Stevens looked at Mr. Marling.

"Well, sir—he did seem a little upset, if I may say so."

Down the steps and into a taxi, driving towards the Fulham Road. . . . Clements! . . . He'd almost forgotten his old friend. . . . Of course he must now know the position . . . his hopes and plans dashed to the ground! . . . The sunshine for his gout—the travelling to which he'd looked forward—for which he'd saved. . . . A question even of affording enough to eat! . . . The taxi rumbled on. . . . Marling sat back, an arm resting either side, his eyes looking eagerly ahead, as if trying to penetrate the darkness that lay in front of him. As before, his mind could take in only one thing at a time. . . . Clements, his old friend Clements, had lost his all. . . . That was all he realized now. And what

could Marling do when he got there? That didn't matter —*he must see Clements!*

The taxi turned off the Brompton Road, just past the Oratory. In a moment he was knocking at the door of Clements' flat. But there was no answer. He knocked, rang and waited again, whilst the taxi stood by the kerb-side. There was still no reply. He wrote then on one of his cards and dropped it through the letter-box.

"Where to, sir?" asked the taxi-driver.

"Stupid of me!" Marling muttered. "Princes Gate —No. 87."

The taxi-driver closed the door and returned to his seat.

He was going home now. And Jordon would have seen that photograph perhaps. . . . It was Marling's custom to take the evening paper back with him, but he knew that the *Star* was delivered for Jordon's benefit each night. He had not seen the *Star*, but it would be there too. It was sure to be. . . . Somehow, he felt that he would be more uncomfortable when facing Jordon. Jordon belonged so utterly to the quiet, dignified, unruffled existence that they had led together for so many years under the same roof. Jordon belonged to the life that was Effie's—and Hugh's. The things that happened outside were of no interest to Jordon; his was the house, and the correct management of that domain. . . .

"Good evening, sir," that servant was saying ten minutes later.

Marling looked quickly to detect any inflexion of the voice; any apparent change in his manner. But there was none. Marling proceeded slowly into his study.

"I won't change to-night, Jordon," he said wearily. "And I'll dine as soon as you are ready."

"Very good, sir."

Marling sank into the leather arm-chair by the fireside, his eyes resting on the burning coal in the grate, finding it welcoming and warming. It was kindly, that fire. Besides, he had sat before it so many times during his lifetime, working out life's problems as he watched the embers burn. . . . And even now the full force of the situation was only dawning upon him. He, Christopher

Marling, was being regarded at that moment by every reader of every evening paper in this country, as a man of questionable character! He, who had lived life according to its highest principles! And Hugh—Hugh would have read the evening paper, too! . . .

He felt suddenly unutterably alone. He lay back in his chair, his head resting on the cushion. He closed his eyes. Sleep!—If he could only sleep! These endless nights of insomnia were taking their toll. How could he expect to face the experiences of the last weeks without sleep? The whole thing was becoming more than he could bear. Even now he was rambling in his thoughts; he seemed able to retain only one thought in his mind. Before he could solve any one aspect of the many problems that danced so hideously before him, another would take its place. He held his head in both hands. Was his reason going, he wondered? Ewart. . . . Mosenthal. . . . Clements. . . . Jordon. . . . Hugh. . . . Barbara's settlement. . . . And nothing had been decided save his resignation, which had been settled for him by their *demanding* it! That had hurt —God, how it had hurt!

Jordon announced dinner. Marling walked steadily into the dining-room and took his seat at the top of the table. The red shades of the candelabra reflected on the polished table, adding warmth again to the comfort of his home—comfort that he appreciated that night more than at any other time. Perhaps, he thought, it was the contrast—the contrast to the nightmares of the past few weeks. There was a quietness about his home that night —a quietness at which he clutched feverishly because it seemed the one comforting thing that he knew. . . . And Jordon standing behind him as he had stood for so many years. . . . Home! What a big word that was when the outside world was fighting to overcome you —to bring you to the ground. When storms brewed and rose in their violence; when the coldness of the outside world ate into your flesh, penetrating it to the marrow—there was always—Home. A home of warm rooms, of soft carpets, of good food. A home that was

filled with memories of the past—the memories on which he lived. . . . And as Jordon came forward to remove his plate, the front-door bell rang.

"Answer it, Jordon!" he said, slowly. "I will wait."

Jordon obeyed, leaving the room quietly. Marling's eyes still looked at a picture that hung above his mantelpiece at the far end of the room. Then a change came over him—his face became suddenly ashen. He clutched at the table with both hands. The realization that came to him at that moment stunned him completely. As one of the chapters in his nightmare, he had seen its possibility, but he had not read its meaning. . . . *His home would be sold now!* . . . Hugh found him, sitting crumpled in his chair.

"Dad!"

Marling looked up.

"Hugh," he said. "Sit down, boy. Port? It's on the sideboard. The cigars are there, too."

"Dad—what's wrong?"

"A little tired, Son—a little tired."

"Have a brandy. You look done up."

"No—I'm all right. Help yourself, boy—it's on the sideboard. I've not finished dinner, as you see. But smoke, if you like."

Hugh walked thoughtfully to the sideboard.

"You've been doing too much," he said. "In a way I'm damned glad this 'Combine' business is over. It's been playing hell with you. There's only one thing worse than losing a battle and that's the uncertainty of not knowing whether you will. It's certainly played you up, Dad. You take things too earnestly. You give too much—always. You've been worrying yourself sick. I've seen it."

"Oh—that's part of the game, Hugh, to give of your best."

"I say—that photograph to-night. Too bad, that."

"Yes, Hugh. It surprised me."

Hugh turned.

"But Mosenthal! I say, a warrant's out! Pretty grim, isn't it?"

"It's terrible, Hugh—terrible!"

Hugh returned to the table.

"They'll never catch him, of course. He's too cute."

"In a way—I hope they don't," Marling said, looking again at that picture at the far end of the room.

"I say, Dad—that's a change of code, isn't it? After all, if he's committed a felony. Can you, as a lawyer, justify his freedom?"

Hugh was treating the matter lightly. Marling realized that—and the smile that accompanied that remark. He looked at his son as he sat beside him in the chair that he had always occupied during those few happy months together—Effie's chair. . . .

"He was my friend," Marling said. "In my opinion, Hugh, he had no evil intentions. He just became too heavily involved—and lost his head."

"Anyhow, thank God you're not heavily involved yourself," Hugh replied. "I always remember what you said to me, Dad, when I wanted to invest my gratuity. 'Put it into War Loan,' you said. 'Be content with your five per cent. You'll sleep better then.' A lot of truth in that."

Marling studied the Georgian salt-cellar at his left.

"Yes," he said, "you do sleep better then, Hugh."

Hugh lighted his cigar, puffing slowly.

"Of course, Dad—well, I hate mentioning it—but it will make a bit of difference to Barbara and me—you know—this crash."

"Yes," Marling replied slowly.

"You see—well, after the meeting we rather hoped for better things—fat dividends. They won't come now."

"No."

"To tell you the truth, Dad—it's come at rather an inconvenient time. I hate mentioning it."

"Yes?" Marling said.

"Well, we're—*I'm*—in rather a hole."

Marling twisted the Georgian salt-cellar, first this way —then that.

"How much?" he asked presently.

"Rather a lot. Five hundred."

"Oh."

"My fault, I'm afraid. You mustn't blame Barbara, Dad. But you know how things happen. She's damned attractive. I like her to look nice. I like her to do things well."

"But Hugh—that's no reason for getting into debt. That's the only thing I've demanded of you."

"But—Dad—things would have been all right if 'Combines' hadn't gone up in smoke."

"I see," Marling said. Again a twisting of the Georgian salt-cellar. Then: "Bring your cigar into my study."

Hugh rose and opened the door. His father rose too. Then he walked through the door into his study and sat thoughtfully at his desk. He unlocked the middle drawer and drew out his cheque-book. Presently he said:

"Here you are, Hugh. I'm glad you've asked me. The only time you ever have. But be careful of money, Son. It's hard to make—sometimes."

Three hours later Marling walked slowly up the stairs to his room. The house was in darkness. But his plans were made. He had returned to the dining-room after Hugh had left and beneath that picture over the mantelpiece, he had found the only solution. It would be the biggest thing he had ever done, but he had to do it. To-morrow he would put the house in the hands of the agents. . . .

In the quietness of his bedroom, his grief overcame him.

* * * * *

In his paper next morning, he read that Mr. John Clements had been found dead in a gas-filled room in the Fulham Road.

CHAPTER XX

THE winter, once set in, was—as Dr. Simpson had prophesied—one of intense cold. By early January snow lay on the ground and remained there longer than it is customary. Hugh sat shivering in the corner of a third-class railway carriage, his coat collar turned up at the neck, his hands in his coat pockets, his legs outstretched.

For the past hour he had been sitting in that position, the other occupant of the carriage believing him to be asleep —until he had raised his eyes from the book he was reading to find Hugh apparently studying the photographs of the health resorts served by the Southern Railway, which were depicted on the other side of the carriage walls.

Hugh had spent two days at Bournemouth, where he had been acting for the defendants in a local case. A settlement had been reached; the plaintiffs suddenly deciding to proceed no further. So Hugh was returning a day earlier than he had anticipated and was glad to be doing so. He had an Englishman's dislike for hotel life. Besides, Gerald was in town and he always wanted to be in London when Gerald was there. He and Barbara had seen so little of him, too, since their marriage.

But there were other things. Old Christopher had now moved into the bed-sitting-room that he had taken in Pall Mall. The old chap would be feeling the loneliness of it —the bare coldness of it all. For Hugh, on learning the true position, it had been a great shock. But the least affected person had been Old Christopher himself. He had gone about the details of it as though he were merely carrying out instructions for a client. The house had been put up for sale right away, but there had been no offers. Not until just before Christmas had he found a man who would consider it. And then the usual palavers had taken place; first it was too big; then it was not quite the house he was looking for. Finally, when a second possible buyer had come along, he purchased immediately.

But they had been able to spend Christmas at Princes Gate. This year only four of them sat round the table in the long dining-room—Mrs. Neilson being the fourth. It was, for Hugh, a most moving occasion. Old Christopher sat bravely in his usual place, as though he would be sitting there—for the rest of his days. No mention was made of the financial situation; no reference whatsoever to the sale of the furniture which would be taking place at Christie's within a few days. It was all as before; as it had always been. Over their port Hugh had sat at his right and they had discussed every topic save the one that

was uppermost in both their minds. Hugh, once given the lead, had acted accordingly. Nevertheless, he detected the sadness that lay beneath that highly glazed boiled shirt when his father, looking at the sideboard, said: "I can't get that in my new room, Hugh. I've measured. Too bad, isn't it?" Then: "And I'm afraid it's too old-fashioned a piece for you and Barbara. Still, it's done me well. Your dear mother chose it. She always knew what was right." Then he looked quickly away. "Another glass of port?" he asked hurriedly. But Hugh had seen that sudden shining of the eyes; that sudden change in the inflexion of his voice.

The position, to Hugh, was heart-breaking. Hugh had argued about it. But Old Christopher would have it no other way. "My income's reduced to my earnings," he had said. "I may not be earning, either, for much longer. Got to save a bit, you know. Besides, what do I want with a large house now? It's handy for the office, too. Just round the corner," and his father had proceeded about the business of disposing of his property—his books, his pictures, his china. Making lists of them; selecting those few things which would fit into his new home; putting always the more valuable pieces on one side for Christie's men to consider.

And as on Christmas night, Hugh had said to Barbara: "Play cribbage with the old chap. Suggest it yourself." So Hugh, too, had tried to find ways of helping. The manner in which his father was facing the sale of all that he loved best in the world, affected Hugh deeply. It was fine! Typical! In the two and a half years he had spent with his father since his return he had learned some of the workings of that mind. He knew, therefore, more intimately what his thoughts would be at this time. The way that Hugh could help was to be with him as often as he could; to leave him to those thoughts as little as possible. Consequently Hugh had spent most evenings with his father during the last weeks. Old Christopher had dined with them at Smith Square; or with Hugh quietly at the club. To-night would be his first in his bed-sitting-room and Hugh had wanted to call there. A word of cheer

would mean so much; a word of praise for the way in which he had perhaps arranged his *bric-à-brac* about the room. A little thing, that. Yet to his father, it would mean a great deal. Thinking that he would still be away, Hugh had asked Barbara to make a point of looking in that evening. That Barbara should call—alone, would touch Old Christopher deeply.

But there was Hugh's own position, too. He had refused to accept any further allowance from his father. Again there had been an argument, but in this Hugh had been adamant. He was now making about five hundred a year at the Bar and, with his few other investments, his total income was about seven hundred and fifty. Of course, the thing was impossible. Barbara always spent that much on herself every year! And there did not seem much possibility, either, of Hugh earning more for some years to come. The Bar was a slow business. The fruits, when they came, were highly prized—but the years of waiting seemed interminable. Hugh, therefore, considered his future—apart from the immediate present—with no little apprehension. He had broken the news to Barbara, but, of course, she could never understand. To be without the things she loved, unlike Old Christopher, would cause her the most intense unhappiness. Unlike Old Christopher again, she would take every opportunity of showing it. Hugh realized that. And in a way, he saw her point of view. For two years now she had been one of the most sought-after young women in London; one of the best dressed; one of the most beautiful. To have to hide, as if in shame, from the places that were hitherto visited daily, either because her frock was too shabby, or because she couldn't really afford the taxi fare, were matters that Barbara would never comprehend. Already the smaller economies that were being practised at Smith Square had caused her considerable alarm. Bertram had been the first to go—"But we must have a butler, Hugh! Don't be silly!" But Minnie opened the front door now. Hugh had seen to that himself. Yet Barbara had dressed her in the most splendid clothes. She wore a mauve dress with chocolate-coloured cuffs and apron. When Hugh had

learned that that dress had cost more than the suits he used to buy in Savile Row—he had been frankly annoyed. But what was the good? Barbara just didn't understand. She never would. The prospect, therefore, of facing life on seven hundred and fifty a year was an impossible one. For that reason, he had discussed the matter with Gerald, who had an uncle—an insurance broker at Lloyds. With Hugh's connections, Gerald said, he might be invaluable. His legal training might be useful, too.

So Hugh had met Mr. John Fortescue, and their liking had been mutual. There was a great future at Lloyds, Mr. Fortescue said, for young men like Hugh. Likeable young men; men with connections; men with intelligence—those were what were needed. Especially at this time. So many of the younger members had been killed. Besides, his firm were underwriters, too. Maybe he could get Hugh into their box. He'd have to be prepared to work, of course. A lot to learn. Yes, and his legal training would be useful there, too. In addition, he would get half commission on any business that he introduced on the broking side, in that eventuality. Anyhow, he'd talk it over with his partners.

So Hugh was considering the matter seriously. It was quite obvious, in any case, that he would have to leave the Bar.

The train rattled on. Hugh wiped the steam from the windows and peered through. They were getting near now. He would just drop his bag at home and then go round to see his father. Maybe Barbara would be there as well. Old Christopher would be interested in the result of this case, too, as he had been instrumental in Hugh getting it.

Hugh was walking down the platform at Waterloo Station a few moments later, his bag in his hand. He gave up his ticket at the barrier and proceeded to the Underground Station, where he booked to Westminster. Presently he emerged from the Tube and crossed by the Houses of Parliament and was shortly entering Smith Square. He opened the pillar-box red door and put his bag in the hall. Then he proceeded upstairs. There were voices in the drawing-room. He opened the door.

"Raynes!"

"Well?"

"I thought," Hugh said, controlling himself, "that I asked you to refrain from coming here!"

"You did—Hugh."

"Then will you please—*go!*"

Hugh was still at the door; he held it open. Barbara was standing beside Bertie, both leaning against the mantelpiece. She moved away and walked forward, as if standing between them.

"You'll not insult my friends in our house!" she said, her head thrown back. "Besides, I asked Bertie here."

"I think, Raynes," Hugh said deliberately, "that we had better talk alone."

"As you like," Bertie replied, calmly.

"Hugh, I will not have a scene in this house!"

"Barbara—will you please leave us!"

The atmosphere was suddenly tense. Hugh stood looking at Bertie; Barbara from one to the other; no one spoke.

"Barbara—please leave us!"

Barbara looked inquiringly at Bertie, who was still leaning against the mantelpiece.

"Yes," Bertie advised, quietly, "I think you'd better leave us, Barbara."

But Barbara stood undecided, her fingers toying with the belt of her dress. For a moment her eyes looked down. Then quickly looking up, she said:

"You men! No—I'll not go!"

Hugh came further into the room. "Very well," he said, "then I'll have to tell Raynes exactly what I think of him in front of you. It won't be pleasant hearing, Barbara!"

In a moment Barbara was between them again.

"I'll not have brawling in my drawing-room!" she cried, her eyes glaring as her arms were outstretched—as if in defence of the man who stood behind her. Hugh took her by the shoulder and pushed her aside.

"Raynes!" he began. "*Clear out!*"

Bertie moved away from the mantelpiece.

"Hugh," he said, "don't let's be dramatic, anyway. I don't think there's any necessity for that. I daresay what I'll have to say will upset you. And before I say it, I'll tell you I'm damned sorry."

"I don't need your apologies, Raynes. Nor do I intend to listen to them. You'll oblige me by leaving my house—*now!*"

Bertie Raynes glanced quickly at Barbara.

"I'm afraid," he said, "I cannot do that—yet. Not till I've told you. You see—I love Barbara. A wretched situation for you, Hugh, I agree. But there it is—I love her."

Hugh's fists were clenched; his body seemed to stiffen.

"Get out of my house, Raynes," he said slowly, "or I'll strike you!"

Barbara was again between them.

"Hugh—this isn't helping the situation. Let's sit down and talk about it. We *must* talk about it. You've got to know some time. You see, I love Bertie—too."

Hugh looked down into two blue eyes that seemed to be looking steadily back into his own; into a face, the beauty of which was heightened by the sudden blush that came now to the cheek—as he had seen it so often in the early days of their married life, when the newness of their love had seemed to cast a shyness over them. He noticed the fairness of her hair, drawn back from her forehead and the little wisp at the side that was curled so often between her fingers when she was thoughtful—or puzzled. He looked down and saw the slimness of her figure and the tiny hands that were now interlocked, one pressing tightly on the other so that they were whiter, even, than was usual. He saw the neatness of her ankles, two little feet. . . .

"Barbara," he said, "are you telling me . . . ?"

"Yes, Hugh," she answered, her eyes still searching his, "I am. I'll never lie to you—you know that. So I'm telling you—now. I love Bertie. I have for some time. We're not just playing around. Besides, we're both old enough to know what we're doing. We've not done this thing because of a blind infatuation. I've known Bertie too long to be infatuated. That's all dead

long ago. But there's no going back now. It's irrevocable, Hugh. I want you to know that." Then her eyes looked down and she was fingering the belt of her dress again.

Hugh stood, as if rooted to the floor. His mouth became dry and parched; his tongue seemed glued to the roof of his mouth, so that he could not speak. His vision became distorted; his whole body seemed to shake as if he were seized with a sudden ague. He ran his hand across his forehead and that movement seemed to loosen his tongue.

"What have you to say?" He was looking at Bertie now. "What have you to say? Don't stand there like the sneak that you are!—Speak up!"

Bertie looked down, too; his eyes now resting on his highly polished shoes.

"Speak up! You who wait till I'm out of sight and then come sneaking round to my house to make love to my wife—speak up! Let's see your courage, you splendid example of British manhood! Let's hear your splendid tale! God—Bertie Raynes, but I never thought that I'd live to feel the desire to kill anyone—in cold blood! You come to my house as our friend—*Friend!* And you stand there now with your hands in your pockets as if you were damned proud of yourself. Proud! Speak up, you swine!"

Uncomfortably, Bertie removed his hands from his trouser pockets.

"You will forgive me, Hugh," he began, "if I own to feeling proud of Barbara's love."

"Cut that out!"

"Well—I'd like you to know it, all the same."

"How far has this gone? Answer me!"

Bertie looked up slowly. He glanced again at Barbara, who still fingered the belt of her dress, now with a greater agitation.

"I think," Bertie answered, "that Barbara has told you it is—irrevocable," and he looked squarely at Hugh.

Hugh moved quickly towards him, but Barbara, seeing the look in his eyes, sprang again between them.

"Hugh! For God's sake, Hugh!"

Again Hugh brushed her aside.

"Barbara—*will you leave us!* This lie—I'll remove it from his lips!—Leave me to him!"

"*Hugh!*"

The suddenness of the command seemed to act on a demented mind. For a moment Hugh stood, as if mesmerized into obedience, his eyes never leaving Bertie's face, his body still shaking uncontrollably.

"Hugh!" Barbara said again. "This isn't helping the situation. It's a pretty vulgar display, anyhow."

"Vulgar!" he hissed. "Vulgar! Does what you are telling me call for anything but the foulest vulgarity? Is there anything more despicable—more loathesome—than what this swine here is proudly owning to have done? Is there any offence that one man can commit against another, more contemptible than coming to his house and seducing his wife? *Vulgarity!* Do you expect me to stand by and applaud? Do you expect me to receive this news with any more dignity than it deserves? God! You must take me for a nincompoop! There is only one way of dealing with seducers," he hissed, "the horsewhip! And if that can be done publicly—so much the better. Yes, Bertie Raynes—I'll settle with you later! And in the meantime, you'll have the decency—if you possess one spark of it—of leaving me alone for a moment with my wife!"

Hugh's lips were trembling with the intensity of his feelings. His eyes were staring, as though they would come out from their sockets. His face was white and beads of cold perspiration lay upon his forehead. But still he stood, his fists clenched at his side. But Bertie made no movement either. Instead, he said:

"Seducing! That's the word you used, Hugh. Well, that may be true, I suppose. But if it comes to that, Barbara belonged to me—*in that way*—before you ever set foot in India."

"God, will you leave this house before I completely lose my control!"

"Unfortunately," Bertie continued, "it's true. A blow

to you, I'm sure. But Barbara won't deny it either. It's better for you to know. You'll understand then, perhaps, that there's no going back now. To say that I'm sorry sounds fatuous. But I am—deucedly sorry. You're right to feel as you do. I'm not too proud of myself. Believe me, when I say that, Hugh. It *is* as rotten a thing as a man can do. But sometimes these things can't be helped. It couldn't in our case. *I* knew—as soon as I returned. It took Barbara longer. But we both know it now—and as far as evidence is concerned, I'm afraid you'll have all you require. I'm not going to wrap things up to make them sound more palatable. I spent last night with Barbara, and if you hadn't returned just now, we should have spent to-night together as well. And these would not have been the first occasions, Hugh. I'm telling you—frankly. So you see there's no going back, I'm afraid. The thing is—settled—irrevocably."

Hugh turned to Barbara. The fire in him seemed to have vanished. The stiffness of his body as he had stood facing Bertie a moment before seemed, too, to have gone. His chest, which a moment before was expanded as he had hissed out his invective, was now crumpled; his shoulders seemed suddenly sloping; his voice hardly audible.

"Is this true?" he asked, quietly.

Barbara looked away.

"Yes," she said.

"You tell me that . . .?"

"Yes," she said again, her voice now almost a whisper.

"For the love of God, you're joking! You're saying this to make things appear more damnable—you're saying this to make me loathe the sight of you and all you stand for! But you can't, Barbara—you can't! Do you think," he cried, "that I'll believe that?" Already he was laughing hysterically. "Damn good! Damn good! But it won't go down. My wife is someone else's mistress when she married me! Damn good! But it won't go down, I tell you. You can't put those things over me. You're saying it to make it easier for yourselves. You think I'll believe it and be glad to be rid of you. But I won't. Those things don't happen—not in our lives. They don't

happen to people—like us. It's outside our standards. And you both stand there and expect me to believe you! Damn good! But I'll not believe a word of it. Raynes, you arrogant swine—you conceited, arrogant swine! Barbara your mistress in India! For that alone you deserve to be ostracized by every decent-thinking man, by every man who calls himself a man. But we'll let that pass—for the moment. We've got a lot to settle by and by, Raynes! But in the meantime, you'll leave my house. I don't believe a word of it! The thing's preposterous. For a moment I almost believed you!" Again he laughed hysterically—"Damn good!—Damn good!" Then his laughter ceased. He looked from one to the other. "Now clear out—you skunk!" he said. But there seemed no authority in his voice, then. He seemed instead returned to a state of helplessness. Again he looked anxiously from one to the other and as neither of them spoke, his hand went to his head.

"Barbara," he muttered. "Deny it—for God's sake deny it! Don't stand there, little Barbara, with this awful accusation unanswered. Don't you see—can't you understand its seriousness? This man here is saying that you're his mistress. *His mistress!* For God's sake, child, throw it back in his face. Look up at me now—and tell me. Your eyes are cast down. But look up at me, Barbara. Throw it back in his face. You couldn't have been like that—could you? You remember the days when I was A.D.C. to your father? All those happy days together? And Gerald too—'The Three Musketeers.' You couldn't have been like that—and have been one of us—could you? The thing's so absurd, child, on the face of it. It just doesn't fit in. Do you remember the night before I left? What you said then? Don't you see, my sweet, that it's not possible? And I look at you now. You're only a child still. You don't realize what this man is saying. That's because you're young—and you don't understand. But he's saying that you're a harlot, Barbara. He's standing beside you now and telling me that you slept together last night! It isn't possible—it *isn't* possible! My brain seems wrong at the moment. I can't sort of collect myself.

But I know *that's* not possible. Why, I've only been away two days! You saw me off, do you remember—at Waterloo? You were going to see Old Christopher to-night. Don't you remember? And this man standing beside you is saying that if I hadn't come back unexpectedly, you'd have been spending to-night with *him*!" He took Barbara suddenly by the shoulders, peering into her face, as if searching the depths of those blue eyes. "Deny it, Barbara," he pleaded. "For God's sake, deny it!"

Barbara looked at him, steadily.

"I wish I could, Hugh," she said, slowly.

A moment later the pillar-box red door had slammed and Hugh was walking quickly through the Square.

* * * * *

Left. Right! Left. Right! Into Whitehall. Past the sentry boxes at Horse Guards. A measured step; in strict time. *Left. Right! Left. Right!* Hugh found himself repeating this to himself as he walked. *Left. Right! Left. Right!* . . . God—was he mad!

The streets were full; traffic on every side. Oblivious to it all, he walked on. Whither he walked he did not care. . . . *Left. Right! Left. Right!* Into Trafalgar Square and along Pall Mall. Presently into St. James's Street. . . . He had passed the house where Old Christopher had his new room, but no matter. He was in no mood to talk to his father. . . . Have to tell him sometime, but not to-night. . . . *Left. Right! Left. Right!* Up St. James's Street and into Piccadilly. Across the road and into Dover Street. At the door of the Bath Club he turned. The next moment he was inside. The lights seemed to dazzle him. He turned to go out.

"Mr. Fortescue is asking for you, sir."

"Oh."

Better see him, he supposed—yes, he'd better face things out. The world would soon know, anyway. . . . A good fellow, Gerald. His best man, too. Yes, he might even talk to him. . . . But no, he didn't feel he could talk about it—yet. He'd better go out into the streets again—they alone seemed detached from all that he knew and felt. They alone were impersonal to the emotions

that surged within his breast. To talk of those things to-night—to labour them was only probing that wound. And the wound was too newly made; the blood was still flowing. It was hurting—God, how it was hurting!

He felt a tap on his shoulder.

"Hugh!"

Hugh turned to find Gerald beside him, his large red ears seemingly larger. . . . But everything seemed distorted to-night. . . . The face of the hall porter, too. . . . Gerald was grinning. The grin seemed to spread over his entire face. Hugh clutched at his arm.

"Gerald!"

"What's wrong, old fellow?"

"Dine with me!"

"Of course."

"Where—*where?*"

"Why—here if you like. But I say, what's wrong?"

Hugh saw the hall porter watching him, too. He turned away. Gerald followed, taking his arm. They walked towards the cloak-room.

"But Hugh—what is it, old fellow?"

"In a minute—in a minute!"

Gerald watched anxiously.

"A drink?"

"No."

"Dine right away?"

"Yes."

Together they walked into the dining-room. Gerald led the way to a table in the far corner. They sat down. Gerald picked up the menu.

"What will you eat?" he asked.

Hugh stared at him for a second. Then he said:

"Barbara's gone! I'll tell you—quietly. Barbara's gone! Bertie Raynes. I left him at Smith Square not an hour ago. They're going off together. I've talked to them. It's no good. She loves him, Gerald. *She loves him!* They've been living together! Christ—it's awful!" Hugh's head sank wearily into his hands, as his elbows rested on the table, shuddering with the horror of it.

"Hugh—you don't mean it!"

But Hugh did not answer. Gerald reached across the table and touched his arm. "I'm damned sorry," he said. "God, but I'm sorry!"

Hugh looked up between his hands.

"The sweetness of her, Gerald—the divine sweetness of her! I can see her face as she looked up at me—now. She didn't deny it. She just looked up at me and told me it was true. You know the honesty of those eyes of hers—they're blue—blue as starlings' eggs, Gerald. They sort of look up at you and make you feel that God made them like that because she was so sweet and pure—so honest—so transparently honest. Her eyes were always like that. You saw through them—cool, deep, blue. But honest, Gerald—above all they were honest. And they looked up at me not an hour ago—looked at me *squarely*—and told me the brutal truth! She'd even lived with Bertie before we married! Out in India! God, Gerald, don't you see the appalling situation? Now she's returned to him! They're together now!"

"Yes," Gerald said, and twisted a fork thoughtfully. "Yes," he said again, his forehead more wrinkled.

"And I think—I look back! The little things about her! The little things she used to do. You'll remember them, Gerald, too. The way she always toyed with that wisp of hair at the side. You remember that? And that smile—that quick, happy smile. Her little body, so lithe, so perfectly formed, so adorable—God! Was ever a woman more adorable, Gerald! And I think of her now—lying, deceitful, giving all her beauty to that swine Raynes! Smiling at him—giving herself to him! Gerald, I think I'm going mad."

Gerald moved uneasily. He put that fork down. Then he said:

"Hugh, believe me, I am more distressed than I can explain. I never was much good at expressing my emotions, anyway. But I'm grieved—terribly grieved—for you. It's so damnably unfair. You don't deserve to be treated this way. Others do—and don't get it. That's the way the world moves. It's cruel—always in the wrong places. I can easily sit here and sympathize with you.

That's because my sympathies are with you—as never before. I can agree with you. I can agree about all the little things she did—things that were damnably attractive to both of us. I can see all those—I always could. We can spend the whole of this evening, which for you must be the saddest you've ever known, in revelling in her beauty—in her amazing charm. We can live again those days in India. We can recount every little incident that mattered. But is that going to help?"

Hugh did not answer.

"Not as I see it," Gerald continued. "I see you—knocked out by the suddenness of this blow. It strikes at the root of all that you treasure most dearly. You always held on to your illusions, Hugh. You always put people on pedestals and were surprised when someone knocked them off. You're too upright; you expect everyone else to be the same way. You, like Old Christopher, live up to the highest moral code because it's inherent in you. But the world isn't that way to-day, Hugh. Therefore to allow ourselves to dwell at this moment on some empty shell is not going to help you. You've got to realize the true position. Until you realize that, you'll be nowhere. You'll go down and down. You'll just live on memories—which are the first things you must forget. Therefore, I'll not help you to recapture those things to-night. I'll try instead—if I can—to adjust things for you in your mind. We agree on the first issue—Barbara was one of the most attractive girls either of us have known. But what was that attraction? Surely it was physical? What good was she to you—really? I've never asked, and I've never expected you to tell me. But I bet she was damned unsatisfactory as a wife. Did she run your home for you—as you wanted it run? Did she fit in to your mode of life as you wanted to lead it? Perhaps, as important even, as Old Christopher wanted you to lead it? I've never asked, but I bet she didn't. You couldn't expect her to. At least, *I* couldn't."

Hugh looked up again.

"You're talking, Gerald, as any outside man might talk," he said. "Someone who only guesses—and doesn't

know. I *loved* Barbara. When I say that, I've said everything. The happiness she gave me is beyond all words. She was just—Barbara. And Barbara was my life. No one is perfect, Gerald. I'm not. I only expect certain things. . . ."

"Yes, Hugh—but those things are terribly fundamental."

"But to forget! One can't just obliterate all this as if one were turning the pages of a book! Don't you see, Gerald—you're talking as if I were some stranger—someone you didn't know. Like a story you might read in a book. But you belong to us—'The Three Musketeers'—you're one of us! You must, therefore, understand a little how I feel. I've been married to Barbara for three years! We've lived together as man and wife. Until an hour ago I thought she was still my wife. It's so sudden. It still seems impossible. You can't talk of adjusting things in my mind at this moment, while the scent of her hair is still in my nostrils! I can see her looking up at me now—just as she was an hour ago. . . ."

"Hugh," Gerald said sternly, "is that the way to face this thing? The scent in your nostrils—surely that is the first thing to remove. Any charm that that scent may have held for you is surely obliterated by all this. It must surely be mocking at you now. And mocking faces must be struck—and struck hard. Nothing is more humiliating. Blow your nose, Hugh, and forget about it—quick! Then you'll not harp on that any more. It's a good beginning."

Hugh looked up again. He was biting his thumb now, and watching the white marks left by his teeth.

"You think I'm unsympathetic, don't you?" Gerald continued. "Well I am—purposely. If I let myself go I could say all kinds of things to you—things that I can't help feeling because I know you, and I'm fond of you. I was your best man, too. All that side of it I see—and feel—only too keenly. But I see you to-night—absolutely broken. I see, too, that you'll grieve over this thing maybe till the end of your days unless someone talks to you—properly. And the sooner that's done—the better. You've always allowed Barbara—or rather *your* pictures of

Barbara—to overshadow everything in your life. You loved too well, Hugh. You loved, too, in a way that is considered old-fashioned to-day. You belong, like Old Christopher, to the world of good manners, of chivalry, of honesty—honesty in its strictest sense. You imagine that other people will share those views with you. But they don't—to-day. I was talking to Old Christopher the other night. I had him to dine here. 'Fortescue,' he said, 'I've been a failure. I refused to believe that the old order changeth. I just went on—but I couldn't compete. Youth—pitiless youth—rode by and destroyed all that I held dear. To-day, my boy,' he continued, 'is not the time for illusions. One must face the world as it is and compete with it on its lower standards. If we don't—we shall all fail.' And then he added: 'I am a wiser man to-day, Fortescue.'" Gerald paused for a moment, twisting his signet-ring awkwardly. "Old Christopher's seen it, you see," he continued. "You must, too. It's no good your spending the rest of your days in a fool's paradise. You'll only feel the hurts more than ever then —when they come. You've always had this exaggerated sense of honour—especially where women are concerned. Well, look what's happened! You're let down. You always will be. The women don't want that respect to-day. They've asked you—they've *shown* you, they don't want it. Their very behaviour alone, shows you. And the respect in which you hold them—irritates them. You must see that. Their talk, their coarseness—it didn't happen before. But it *does* happen to-day. And while it does, you must accept it and adjust your ideas accordingly."

Hugh stopped biting his thumb. He was listening now. His hands gripping the sides of the table; his eyes intently upon Gerald's face.

"Youth!" Gerald continued. "Old Christopher didn't mean youth—*as* youth. He meant the present-day conditions—generally. 'Youth—pitiless youth—rode by,' he said, 'and destroyed all that I held dear.' I felt more sorry for him at that moment than at any time since his crash. He felt it intensely. The antagonism was there

when he said that. But he'll adjust all right. He's learnt his lesson, and as cruel a lesson as I can conceive. You're learning yours now, too. A large part of your grief to-day, Hugh, is the sin Barbara has committed against society. She, a married woman, has done this terrible thing! But thousands of married women are doing this same thing to-day, and thinking nothing of it. Neither does the world. The divorce courts are full and you can have all the lurid details of your liaison broadcast to the world through the newspapers—and still the world accepts you. The world doesn't mind what you do so long as you are amusing, or if you contribute in some degree to the world's amusements. Some men pay well—give good parties—throw their money about. They'll always be accepted. Some women are lovely, and they can never do wrong, either. There's only one kind of cheating the world won't allow, and that's cheating at cards. You can steal a man's wife and still be a hell of a good fellow. And you, Hugh, have got to accept those wife-stealers, too. I speak literally and metaphorically. I know lots of them."

"You talk, Gerald, as if it's only my pride that's hurt!"

"I own that you're feeling stunned," Gerald agreed. "I can't imagine anything more unpleasant. Especially if you loved—as you did. But what *did* you love? It couldn't have been her character. You know, now, that she wasn't too fussy about who she picked for her affairs, and I wouldn't mind betting that Bertie wasn't the first. . . ."

"Gerald!"

Gerald raised his hand.

"I am being brutal—purposely," he said. "Look at your reduced circumstances! Do you think Barbara could ever have stood for that? It's only a refined form of harlotry, really. You can always keep a mistress, Hugh—if you've the money." Gerald fingered his left ear thoughtfully. "Yes, Hugh," he said, "sad though it is, I'm afraid all this was bound to be. Let's face that. She never could have stood poverty, anyway. Perhaps it's as well that all this has happened now—that rich Bertie Raynes has taken her over. It's giving you a chance, anyway. Better now than later."

Hugh's eyes became alive. "For God's sake, Gerald!" he began. . . .

Gerald raised his hand once more. "Hugh," he said, "I'll tell you something. Do you remember dining with me here soon after we got back? I don't suppose you do, but we sat at this very table. You told me you were engaged. Do you remember?"

"I do," Hugh answered, sharply. Then, seeing the look in Gerald's face, he changed his tone. "I thought you were jealous about it," he said, slowly. "You seemed different—after you heard."

Gerald sat for a moment fingering that fork again.

"I was," he said, "indeed I was. But it wasn't jealousy, Hugh. My position at that moment was extremely delicate. As things have turned out I wish I'd spoken then. But somehow I felt I couldn't. It mightn't have been fair."

"What?" Hugh asked.

"Well—I'd been Barbara's lover myself—on and off."

The club waiter came to their table and food was ordered. As soon as he had departed, Gerald said: "A delicate position, Hugh. Yes—and I wasn't the first."

Hugh did not answer. He seemed to be looking past Gerald's shoulder into the far distance.

"You see, my attitude towards women of that kind," Hugh heard Gerald say, "is to play up to them. Usually they're the most attractive ones, too. It's a mutual business, anyway. Besides, Barbara was very intelligent and we got on damned well. . . ."

"The Three Musketeers. . . ."

"Yes, Hugh—the Three Musketeers. But our relations didn't interfere with that. Those things happened sometimes—and were then forgotten. We didn't harp on them or build fairy castles around them. It was all terribly animal, I suppose. In fairness to Barbara, it was mostly before you came out. When you told me you were engaged I felt I ought to tell you. It seemed wrong to hide it from you. After all, I knew you'd ask me to be your best man. I knew that. To be acting in that capacity for a friend who was marrying a woman who'd been my lover—

seemed wrong somehow. But on reflection, I said nothing. It didn't seem fair to Barbara."

Still Hugh did not speak. His eyes were at the far end of the room. There was no movement of his face. No flicker, even, of an eyelid.

"The world has many Barbaras," Gerald was saying. "One recognizes them—usually—at first sight. And when one does, one treats them accordingly. You needn't feel awkward about accepting their favours then, because they are given so freely that they're forgotten as soon as they're given. Barbara and I had no romantic emotions about each other. We just liked each other—mutually. But sometimes the other things had to be—too. You see, their whole outlook is different. Their sense of values, too. I remember Barbara saying to me once—'I'm glad I didn't wait till I was married. I'd have been so disappointed.' That's their attitude in a nutshell. You refuse to believe that the women who figure in our lives can have these emotions—can even know of these things. You think that those things belong only to the women of the streets. But you're pathetically wrong, Hugh. And in this post-war existence, this condition becomes increasingly apparent. The ideas you hold are charming. Unfortunately they don't belong—to-day."

Hugh was standing.

"Where are you going?"

"Out!" Hugh said.

"Sit down, Hugh! The food's just coming."

But Hugh had left the table. Gerald followed, but he was brushed hurriedly aside.

* * * * *

Two hours later Hugh found himself again in Smith Square. He had left the club, and where he had been walking since that time he did not know. He had just walked, oblivious to his surroundings. Through streets that were unknown to him; into quiet squares. Once he had found himself by the river. But on he walked. And the keen east wind blew in his face, driving out the evil thoughts that were tormenting his soul. . . . Bertie! . . . *Gerald!* . . . And it was mostly of Gerald that he thought

—Gerald who belonged to the Three Musketeers! . . . He tried to shake off the appalling truths with which he had been confronted so suddenly. . . . God, was such a thing possible! . . . Barbara, little Barbara . . . a harlot! . . . A divorce now. . . . Emptiness . . . everything gone . . . finished . . . dead!

He hurried his footsteps, drawing his tweed coat more tightly around him. . . . And he was passing the pillar-box red door now. . . . Why? . . . *Why?* . . . Of course, he remembered now. His bag. It was just inside the door, in the hall. That is, if Minnie hadn't moved it. And he'd got to get that bag, because he couldn't sleep in that house any more. He'd have to go to some hotel. Perhaps to one of those small places in the Wilton Road—where he had directed that poor woman one Christmas Eve—the one with the papier-mâché suitcase. . . . Yes, that is what he would have to do now. . . . *A Marling was being divorced!* . . . God, hadn't 'Old Christopher' had enough already! . . .

Hugh stood in front of his red door. His face was set, though his lips were quivering. Slowly he put the key into the lock and opened the door. Yes, the bag still lay as he had left it. The lights were on in the hall. Upstairs was in darkness. On the hall table was a note—in Barbara's writing. . . . The colour left his cheeks. . . . Then he picked it up and walked slowly into the dining-room. He stood for a moment with the letter in his hand.

Presently he sat down.

"*Forgive me, Hugh. But it's better really. I'd never make a poor man's wife. I'd be impossible. Even* I *know that. I can't face the thought of being in London without living our old life. I do mind what people say really and* I *loathe being poor.*

As it is, Bertie and I are going to Paris. You'll divorce me, won't you? There's all the evidence you'll want. I stayed at Bertie's room at the Belton last night. And I've often been to his rooms before that. It all sounds rather crude, but one has to be business-like about it.

I hate hurting you, though you may not think so. But it had to be, Hugh. You see I've got to be a hunter, too. You're

too kind. You killed my love with your kindness—your thoughtfulness. You made life too sure for me. I always knew where I was with you. That may sound paradoxical. But I could have loved you far more had you treated me badly. I don't suppose you'll ever understand that. You're not the type who can. But it's true.

I've not said a word to Minnie. I'm leaving all the arrangements to you. Good-bye, Hugh, dear. You're a very sweet person really, and I wish I hadn't to do this. Tell O.C. I'm sorry too. I ought to be there with him now. Explain—will you? Take him some flowers from me. And I was getting him a frame for my photograph. It's in the top drawer of the tall-boy. If he wants it—will you take it round?

BARBARA.

P.S.—On second thoughts, don't worry about the photo frame, because I don't suppose he'll want it."

Presently Hugh rose from his chair and dropped the letter into the dying embers of the fire. He stood by the mantelpiece watching it as it lay there. . . . It didn't burn. . . . He picked up the poker and pushed it fiercely into the flames. It caught fire at one end. . . .

He turned away. His face was white with cold fury. Domestic details! Even remembering domestic details at such a time! And Money. . . . Yes, she'd even mentioned that! . . . Gerald was right. . . . 'I loathe being poor,' she'd said. . . . He'd better read it again. . . . But no, the letter was burnt now. . . . Look! —the ash was in the corner there. . . . He could never read it again. . . . Perhaps that was as well. . . . He walked unsteadily upstairs. The drawing-room was just as he had left it. Stubs of Bertie's cigarettes littered the grate. He sank down on to the Italian sofa, his head in his hands. . . .

A car drew up outside. The front-door bell rang. Hugh was quickly on his feet. If it should be Barbara! . . . But no—she had a key. He was seeing things better now. The cold fury of his anger was making him see reason. At that moment he discovered that he loathed Barbara—loathed her with a cold calculating hatred. Her

letter had been the climax. He stood before the fire in his drawing-room, his fists clenched.

The door opened.

"Hello, Hugh!"

"Pat!"

"Is Barbara in?"

"No."

"She *is* the limit! I lent her a diamond clasp. She promised to return it the next day. But of course—she didn't!"

"Oh."

"I'm just on my way to the Calthorpes. As they sent the car for me, I have to go. And this dress is almost indecent without something to keep it together."

"Oh—I see! Well, Barbara's out! In fact, she's gone! She's left me!"

Pat came further into the room.

"*You don't mean. . .?*"

"Yes," Hugh said, "I do! Bertie Raynes! Did you know about it?"

Pat looked up into Hugh's face. It seemed lined to-night. His eyes looked tired, but behind them Pat detected the defiance. Even his last question seemed an accusation—as if she, too, must be in this secret. She, who was Barbara's greatest friend—as if she must have shared that guilty secret with her. Pat continued to look into Hugh's eyes.

"No, Hugh," she answered.

"Pat—an hour ago I was beside myself! I just couldn't think. It seemed impossible—*everything* seemed impossible. I was mad, I think. I just walked the streets. I'd have been walking them still, only I had to come in here to collect something. Everything that I've lived for—seemed to crash—suddenly. But at this moment, *I don't care!*" Hugh took her fiercely by the shoulders. "Are all you women—like that?" he hissed.

Minnie knocked at the door. Would the mistress be returning to-night? She had seen her leave with luggage. She wanted to know about turning the beds down. No, she was *not* returning!

Pat walked slowly to the sofa and sat down, her hands in her lap, her face expressionless. Hugh paced the floor, talking—always talking. He recounted every incident of the last few hours, as if he delighted in them. He seemed to be removing every vestige of his shattered romance from his soul—purging it, purifying it. Pat watched him silently.

"What will you do—Hugh?" she asked, presently, as she watched her fingers intertwining, one into the other. "Will you divorce her?"

Hugh stopped in his walk.

"I suppose so," he said, quiet once more. "I suppose so, Pat."

"It's terribly—sordid," Pat said.

"And yet," Hugh continued thoughtfully, "one can't blazon that sort of thing to the world at large. One can't blazon the fact that one's wife was a harlot!"

Pat shuddered. "She's rather asked for it—Hugh," she said.

Hugh stood. "No," he said, "one can't do that."

"What will you do then?"

Hugh was staring at the opposite wall. "No," he said again, "one can't do that, Pat. *I'll* have to do it, I suppose."

"What—give the evidence?"

"Yes—I'll have to do it. I see that now."

"Is it necessary to carry chivalry—that far?" Pat asked, still intertwining her fingers. "Besides, what will you do?"

"I don't know," Hugh answered, still staring at the opposite wall. "I don't know. Find some woman, I suppose. Pat—isn't it all foul? Isn't it all absolutely foul? But I'll do it. I must do it."

"I hate the thought of your doing that," she said thoughtfully. "Just going out and finding some woman." Then she rose and walked over to him. "Hugh," she said, "you're too nice for this world. Good night!"

"That clasp. . . ."

Pat smiled sadly. "Don't worry, Hugh. I'm going home to bed. I can't go out—now."

Hugh saw her into the car. Neither spoke going down the stairs. At the door she said: "Will you hate that—Hugh? The evidence? Having to do that?"

"Like hell," Hugh muttered, looking away.

They stood for a moment at the door. Then Pat turned and walked down the few steps into the street. "Home!" she said. Then she entered the car through the door that the chauffeur was holding open for her. She turned and waved through the window. Then the car sped away into the darkness.

Hugh bolted his front door and returned slowly upstairs. He sank once more into the Italian sofa. His eyes seemed open and staring—his face white and set. Dark rings encircled his eyes. The scar on his cheek seemed like a scarlet gash against his pallid skin. His hair was ruffled. His face was lined. . . . He sat. Occasionally he paced the floor. Then a return to the Italian sofa. Pacing again. Endless cigarettes. . . . Then across the quietness of the Square the deep notes of Big Ben—three o'clock!

Hugh rose and walked upstairs to his dressing-room.

CHAPTER XXI

THE rain beat down on London's pavements; the wind drove it in sudden gusts against Hugh's trouser legs as he battled on—his umbrella before him. Hugh was returning from Pall Mall to spend his last night in Smith Square. He could not find a taxi. Had the evening been fine he would still have walked, for he did not now ride in taxis. But the ferocity of the wind and rain made walking difficult. Already Hugh's clothing was wet through.

Cars speeded by on their way back from the theatre. Taxis rattled past. He waited and crossed the Mall and presently into Horse Guards Parade. He tramped on, the wind whistling around him; his umbrella, sometimes almost blowing inside out, carried in both hands. Already the rain had penetrated his shoes so that his socks oozed water through his frozen toes. He battled on.

He had woken from a restless sleep that morning to hear the rain beating against the window-pane; the twin bed to his own—empty. Slowly he had risen from his bed and dressed. It was too dark to dress without electric light. A gloom, almost of late afternoon, lay over London the entire day. He had gone downstairs and given notice to his staff. Minnie had cried. The cook had received the news more placidly. Then he had walked to Ebury Street and searched for rooms. He would let the house, maybe. Perhaps even sell all the furniture. One thing was certain—he must leave Smith Square. He could not spend another night under its roof. Whilst he could face the position more equably now, the memories of that house, nevertheless, were more than he could bear. A door-to-door search of Ebury Street, and he had found rooms with a Mrs. Pawson. Then he took a Tube to the Temple.

On arrival, he rang up Gerald, who came down to see him at his chambers. They lunched together. Of Barbara's whereabouts they knew nothing. . . . After a distracted afternoon he caught a number 96 'bus in the Strand and alighted as it turned up Waterloo Place. Then he walked along Pall Mall to his father's lodgings.

"Ah—Hugh! Nice to see you, my boy. Very comfortable here, you see. Come in. A glass of sherry?"

And presently Hugh had told him. . . .

The old man had sat in his leather arm-chair by the fireside—the one from his study at Princes Gate. He listened quietly. He spoke no word whilst his son was speaking. Then he looked up and said:

"Hugh—dear boy. I feel for you. Awful thing—losing a wife—that way. But I'm glad you'll shoulder the responsibility. Wouldn't do to let the world know. Effie, you know, wouldn't approve of that. Margaret either. Good for you, Son. Good for you!" and shakily his hand had returned his cigar to his mouth.

They didn't dine. Neither of them seemed hungry. The housekeeper produced some sandwiches for them which they ate in front of the fire, between sips of sherry. Hugh

looked at his mother's picture over the mantelpiece; at the few familiar objects about the room. . . .

Presently Marling said:

"You know, Hugh, we're unlucky, you and I. The sad part is that I'm to blame. I ought to have known. I let ambition run away with me. You never seem to blame me, Son. You accept it philosophically. I'm grateful. It saves words. But we understand each other, you and I. But I'd like to tell you—to-night. . . ."

"There's no need, Dad. I know," Hugh said.

Marling looked quickly at his son.

"There's one thing left though," he said, "a great thing! To understand each other. Great, that, boy—isn't it?"

"Great!" Hugh replied, answering his father's smile.

"We'll stick together, Hugh. We'll need it now. We'll get over our troubles together. You might come and live here—with me. We'll make room somehow. There's a room upstairs to let. We'll both be a bit lonely, you know. A bad winter, too, so the papers say. Not over yet."

"No," Hugh said.

"And I'll still be able to help you at the Bar."

"I'll have to leave it," Hugh replied, looking into the fire.

Marling reached for his glass and drank again, taking a longer time over it, smelling the sherry first—then seemingly rolling it round his tongue. He replaced his glass on the shelf and leant over the fire.

"Not making enough?" he asked presently.

"Doesn't seem like it," Hugh replied.

Another silence.

"I'll find you enough to carry on," Marling said. "I can afford it, Hugh."

"No," Hugh said. "I'll stand on my own feet now. You've done enough."

"Always wanted you at the Bar, you know."

"Yes. Fate's worked it differently, though. Maybe it's as well."

Presently:

"Maybe."

Another glass of sherry together. Then Hugh had risen.

"Good night, Dad. You've been a brick about—Barbara. It'll be a blow to you. I know that."

"Life—Hugh. I understand it better now. Learnt a lot in the last few months. Better for it, maybe—better for it."

"Yes."

"Good night, Son. Been a big shock to you. Must have been. But we'll get over it—you and I. It needs a stiff upper lip—but we'll do it. I'll inquire about that room upstairs."

"Thank you, Dad. It'll be like old times—eh?" and Hugh had forced a smile.

And then by the door Marling had taken his son's arm.

"You've never blamed me, Hugh," he said. "Your allowance—I should have settled it on you. But things seemed so sure, boy. There seemed no need."

"No," Hugh said. And then: "Things seemed different then—didn't they—everything?"

Marling was fingering the door handle. "Yes," he said. "But it's taught us something, Hugh. It's brought us closer together, too. That's something, isn't it?"

"Yes—Dad—it is."

A grip of two hands, firm and strong.

"Good night, Hugh."

"Good night, Dad."

Hugh had turned quickly then and had walked down the stairs as his father stood by the banisters. A wave and he had been out in the street, the rain pouring down on to his clothes before he could open his umbrella. . . . And now he was crossing Horse Guards Parade. In a few moments he would be crossing Victoria Street and presently into Smith Square. He came at last to the pillar-box red door and opened it. A reaction from the happenings of the last twenty-four hours seemed to descend upon him. . . . He entered a deserted house. No flowers were in the rooms; an air of uncared-for neglect about each one. No fires had been lighted. And it was cold

—bitterly cold. He called for Minnie, but there was no answer. . . . He remembered then . . . he had told her to go out—pictures or something. . . . She had seemed so upset when he'd given her notice in the morning. . . . She had cried, of course. . . . He remembered now. . . . He walked from room to room. He came to their bedroom. The two beds side by side were covered with their golden coverlets. . . . He looked round the room. Yes, everything was as before. . . . Except its emptiness. God!—the emptiness! The dressing-table was bare. No longer did Barbara's tortoiseshell brushes rest there . . . her pots—the endless array of tiny glass bottles, of scents, of lotions. . . . He walked to the cupboards. . . . Those were empty, too. . . . No, just two dresses on hangers at the far end. . . . The white one, too—the one that he had always loved. . . . He stood there, fingering it almost lovingly. . . . It belonged, that dress, to something that he had cherished—something that was no more. . . . He remembered the first night that Barbara had worn that. . . . That night at the Berkeley. . . . Pat was there. . . . The first time he had really understood Pat. . . . But Bertie had been there, too! . . . Slowly he wrenched the dress from its hanger, tearing it ruthlessly into shreds. . . . Minnie came in a few moments later and found him standing there with the torn remnants in his hands. . . .

But she said nothing. Instead she made him take off his wet clothes and suggested a bath. But there was no hot water. . . . No, she hadn't thought it necessary to light the fire. . . . So she brought him, instead, a hot whisky and lemon when he was in bed.

"It's very sad, sir," she said, as she stood by the door.

"It is," Hugh replied, looking at the ceiling.

"When I think of the lively times there's been in this house—it just brings a lump to my throat, sir."

"Yes," Hugh said. And then: "Good night, Minnie."

"Good night, sir. You've been good to me. I wish I could stay and look after you."

"So do I, Minnie."

But Hugh heard her sob as she hastily turned out the

light, leaving him to lie in the darkness, counting the hours as they were struck by Big Ben. Recounting, too, in his mind the days that were past. Remembering every intimate detail of his life since his return. But of Barbara he thought mostly. His hand reached out and touched her bed. Was it only a nightmare after all? But no—her bed was empty. No, it was no nightmare. This was the cold-blooded truth. His heart sank again. He tossed in his bed, lying first this way, then that. But sleep would not come to him. A melody rang through his brain—what was it? '*Japanese Sandman.*' Of course, that was it. Barbara was always playing that on her gramophone. And his old father. How splendid he was! Their little dinner round the fire in his bed-sitting-room that evening. . . . "We'll get over it—you and I." Yes, there was always 'Old Christopher.' The rest had gone. The rest were memories now. Memories, too, that he must obliterate. If only he could obliterate them! Again he tossed from side to side.

And as Hugh Marling lay on his troubled bed that night, 'Old Christopher' was sleeping peacefully. Hugh was informed by telephone the next morning. The old man had died in his sleep—a smile on his lips.

CHAPTER XXII

'OLD CHRISTOPHER' was buried at Brookwood. Only his more intimate friends attended. Lord Barlow drove Hugh down in his new car, resplendent again with arms on its doors. Beside them were Harold and Lord Ewart. At the cemetery Hugh saw Benson and Jordon—who had been given the day off from his new place to pay his last respects to his old master. Gerald had come down independently. Sir John Bickworth brought Henry Newcomb and Thomas Holbrook. There were many wreaths. The ceremony over, Lord Barlow dropped Hugh at his rooms in Ebury Street.

Hugh nodded to him and went inside. He couldn't talk. He could only think of their last meal together—

the sandwiches and sherry over his meagre fire. And of 'Old Christopher's' last words—"We'll get over it together—you and I. . . ." And now Hugh was alone—utterly alone. . . . He removed his coat and lighted the gas fire. He sat before it, drawing his chair as close to it as was possible. He watched the asbestos in the fire becoming red hot and warmed his hands by it. But it gave little cheer.

"The passing of a grand old man," Jordon had said as they had left the graveside. How kind everyone had been! How beautifully they had spoken of his father! It was comforting, that. It would have done 'Old Christopher' good to have heard them, he who had felt that he was living under a cloud.

The front-door bell rang. Another lodger, Hugh thought, who'd forgotten his key. They were forever forgetting their keys. Large enough, they were, too. He shivered again and drew nearer to the fire. . . . And Barbara? He wondered if she knew. . . . He would have liked to have told her. But perhaps she would have read the announcement in the papers. . . . And a fortnight before Barbara had been with him at Smith Square! Apart from having less money to spend—all was as before. 'Old Christopher' had been alive too. . . . A wave of utter loneliness swept over him. . . . The lump in his throat which he had been forcing back for the last few days seemed to grow larger. . . . His head fell into his hands . . . he could bear no more. . . .

The door opened. "A lady to see you, Mr. Marling," a voice said. Hugh turned.

"Pat!"

"I had to come," she said simply. "I thought of you to-night—all alone."

"Sweet of you," Hugh said quickly, removing the dampness from his eyes. "Dear of you."

She came into the room.

"But you shouldn't have come," he said. "Not to my rooms."

"Why?" Pat asked.

"Well—I mean. . . ."

Pat closed the door.

"Hugh," she said quietly, her eyes downcast. "Our last conversation—you remember it? I've thought about it so much since then. I hear that names aren't made public. No one will know. I know it sounds dreadful. I never thought I could suggest a thing like this. But you see, I love you. I couldn't bear it to be otherwise."

Hugh looked down, too. He saw that she carried a small suitcase in her hand. . . .

THE END

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